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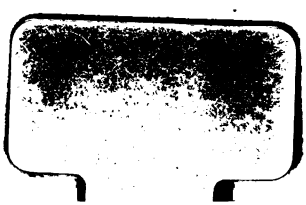

THE

CASTLE OF EHRENSTEIN.

VOL. III.

THE

CASTLE OF EHRENSTEIN;

ITS LORDS

Spiritual and Temporal;

ITS INHABITANTS

Earthly and Unearthly.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"HEIDELBERG;" "THE STEP-MOTHER;" "THE SMUGGLER;"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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EHRENSTEIN.

CHAPTER I.

The glorious sun and the free air of heaven, the blue arch above, the green fresh world around, the face of man, the sweet human voice, greeted the senses of Martin of Dillberg for the last time. The chaplain of Count Frederick had been with him for some hours; but his voice had made no impression. He would neither confess that he had offended, nor acknowledge the justice of his sentence. Sullen and dogged, though evidently terrified and cowed, he remained either obstinately silent, or murmured low curses to himself, till he was brought out from his place of im-

prisonment, and led towards the drawbridge. Glaring round, with eyes at once fearful and fierce, he soon perceived the retainers of Ehrenstein guarding the gates, and the soldiers of Leiningen in possession of the drawbridge; while on the right, at a little distance, stood Count Frederick, with his arms sternly folded on his chest, and surrounded by several of his knights. In front was a large beam of wood, with a tall, powerful man, bare armed, leaning on an axe. The youth shuddered; but with the bitter and malicious spirit still strong in his bosom, which had been his bane through life, he looked round for Ferdinand of Altenburg, who, he doubted not, was to share his fate. He saw him nowhere; but he remarked that the chaplain went up to Count Frederick, on a sign, and that his lord spoke eagerly a few words which he could not hear. They were, "Has he shown contrition? Has he confessed and repented?"

"Alas! no, my good lord," replied the chaplain; "yet it is a pity that one so young——"

"It is," said the Count, musing; "were there a hope—but this is now the third time, and hope is gone. Nevertheless——"

But ere he could conclude the sentence, the voice of Martin of Dillberg was heard exclaiming, bitterly, "I see not the man who is more guilty than I am. Where is that Ferdinand of Altenburg? Let me see him die first; or will you spare him, and murder me?"

An expression of high scorn and indignation came over the face of Count Frederick as he heard those words, and pointing to the criminal, he said, "To the block with him—there is no hope!"

The trumpet sounded; they drew him on, and bade him kneel; but when he saw the axe and the bare-armed executioner, his heart failed him, and he drew back and trembled violently.

"Down, coward!" said an old soldier behind him; but yet even that contemptuous word had not power to goad him to assume a daring that was not really in his breast; and

still he held back, and gazed wildly at the instrument of his death. The priest advanced to his side, and whispered some words in his ear—they were words of hope and promise for a world to come; but all the unhappy youth's thoughts were fixed on this life, even at the moment he was quitting it; and he murmured, "I will confess—I will pray for pardon!"

"It is in vain," said the chaplain; "your own words but now, have destroyed you. The Count is gone, and you must die."

Martin of Dillberg looked round; but Count Frederick was no longer there; and at the same moment the hands of some of those who had been his companions, but not his friends—he had no friend amongst them—seized him, and bent him down to the block. Then all withdrew for a few steps, except the priest, who still stood by his side, addressing to his dull unlistening ear the words of holy exhortation. There was a movement in the youth's limbs, as if he would fain have risen

again; but then the trumpet sounded again, the heavy axe fell hard upon his neck, and at that one blow, the head, smote off, rolled upon the drawbridge.

The men around were used to sights of blood, to daily peril, and to the image of death; but still there were various feelings amongst them. None murmured, it is true,—all admitted that his fate was just, and that he had been pardoned but too often. Some sternly said, it was a good deed done, and turned away contented; but others felt a sensation of awe, and even of pain, at witnessing the violent death of one so young, though brought about by acts of craft and wickedness beyond his years. Count Frederick remained in his own chamber for some time alone, and in deep meditation; and when at length he came forth, his cheek was pale, and his whole air sad.

He had but taken three steps in the corridor, however, when he was roused from the reverie in which he seemed plunged, by the agitation and bustle which might be observed

in the castle. Persons were passing up and down the great stairs; doors were opening and closing; there was a sound of trampling horses in the court-yard, and many voices speaking; but above all rose the tones of the Count of Ehrenstein, apparently in anger. Further on, towards the other end of the wide passage, Count Frederick beheld his own page apparently listening to the mingled din; and so occupied was the boy that he did not perceive his lord had quitted his chamber, till the Count called him to him.

"What is the matter, Albert of Landeck?" asked the nobleman, as the page ran up at his call; "there seems a strange confusion here."

"'T is, my good lord, that the Lady Adelaide has escaped from the chamber where her father had imprisoned her," answered the boy; "and no one knows how or whither she has gone. The door was still locked, they say, and not a trace of her to be found."

"'T is a strange place, this castle of Ehrenstein," said Count Frederick, with a smile;

" has my noble friend no suspicion of who has aided her flight?"

"I heard him vow but now, that it was the monks from the abbey," answered the boy; " he sent down, an hour ago, it seems, to one Father George, at the chapel we passed yesterday in the wood, requiring his presence to shrive Ferdinand of Altenburg; but no monk was to be found there; and so he thinks it must have been he who has spirited the lady away."

" I will go down and speak with him," said Count Frederick; and, descending the stairs, he found his host, with heated look, and fiery words, urging his horsemen, who were mounting as rapidly as possible, to more speed.

"Quick, fool, quick!" he cried to one; " will you have never done that buckling of the girth? Away, by the upper road, to Anweiler. They cannot be far. Take the road to the left, as soon as you top the hill, and sweep round through the woods, meeting Mosbach by the blacksmith's forge. You, Sickendorf, with four or five more, to the abbey at once,

and demand the lady of the abbot, in her father's name. Tell him, as sure as the sun shines in heaven, I will burn his monkery about his ears, if he conceals her. You, Adolph, track along the stream, letting some of the men dismount and look for the prints of horses' feet. If you can find any, follow them. Quick to the saddle—to the saddle ; a minute, more or less, may save or ruin all. Ha! my noble friend. This is a sad and terrible thing; my daughter fled, and no clue or tidings of her!"

"And the youth?" inquired Count Frederick; "can he give you no information? He, most likely, has some knowledge of her means of escape. Doubtless, the probable necessity of such a step was calculated on beforehand."

"Ha! in my anxiety I forgot him," cried the Count; "true, true—I will have it from his heart—I will put him to the torture. Go, bring Ferdinand of Altenburg hither to the great hall. We will have him in the great hall, Count Frederick. He feared it not in old times; now he shall have cause to fear."

Thus saying, he led the way, while his friend followed, the party being swelled by the jester, the chaplain, and one or two of Count Frederick's attendants, as they went. What it was that Herr von Narren said to those who followed, the two noblemen did not hear; but just as they reached the door of the great hall, and while the man, to whom the Count had given his orders respecting Ferdinand, was drawing back the bolts on the other side of the vestibule, a loud laugh, in which even the priest joined, though not so vociferously as the rest, struck harshly on the Count of Ehrenstein's ear; and flinging back the door of the hall, he took three steps in. Then, however, he stopped suddenly, and gazed with haggard eyes before, around, above him. Count Frederick also looked with an expression of wonder round the walls; and, in truth, it was a strange sight that presented itself. The banners were all gone; the green bows and chaplets of flowers, wreaths, and coronets, were no longer seen; but on every banner-pole

hung a mouldy shroud, and each thick column was covered with a pall.

"In Heaven's name! what is this?" exclaimed Count Frederick; "'t is a strange way of tricking out your hall, Ehrenstein."

"'T is for the bridal! 't is for the bridal, uncle!" cried the jester.

"What bridal, fool?" cried the Count of Ehrenstein, fiercely, remembering only the hated union between his daughter and Ferdinand of Altenburg.

"Why, the bridal between the worm and the corpse," answered the jester; "there are few more merry weddings; but what is that on the chair of state? It looks marvellous like a pillow after a man's nose has bled in the night."

Count Frederick advanced with a quick step, and his host followed with a pale cheek. The object which had attracted the jester's notice proved to be a blood-stained coat of arms, cut and torn in many places, and on it lay a strip of parchment inscribed with the

words, "Wilhelm, Count of Ehrenstein—summoned—judged—condemned.—Death."

"What is all this, my friend?" asked Count Frederick; "you seem to decorate your hall somewhat strangely."

But as he spoke, there was a hurried step upon the pavement behind; and the man who had been sent to bring Ferdinand before his lord, approached, exclaiming, "He is not there, my lord. The door was fast locked—not a bolt drawn; but he is gone. Food and wine are there, as if he had fared well before he went, but not a trace of him can I find."

"Wise young man," cried the jester, "he walks after supper. 'T is a wholesome practice, and in his case peculiarly preservative of health. He must have a good physician."

The Count of Ehrenstein folded his arms upon his chest; and gazing on the bystanders, murmured, "I am betrayed." Then turning to the chair again, he fixed his eyes upon the soiled coat of arms, raised the slip of parchment, read it, and threw it down again, turning to his guest

and saying, "Who can have done all this? I know nought of it. I deck not my hall with shrouds, nor set free my own prisoners. Who can have done this?"

"Nay, it is very strange!" answered Count Frederick. "It would take a man hours to spread these out. Good faith! I love not the neighbourhood of such dark mysteries, — and the youth gone, too! I wonder if our friend of Eppenfeld is safe; for in truth, my noble friend, your doors seem not the most secure."

"We will send and see," replied the Count of Ehrenstein; but the reader is already aware of what must have been the result of the search. The Baron of Eppenfeld was not to be found; and with a somewhat heavy brow Count Frederick exclaimed, "He must be taken! Alone, on foot, and without money, he cannot go far—he must be taken, Ehrenstein."

"Good faith! my noble friend, I would willingly help you," answered his host; "but

I have, as you well know, matters on hand that touch me nearer far; and all the men I can spare must be absent, seeking for this undutiful girl and her perfidious paramour. Doubtless these monks are the movers in all this; and I will burn their abbey about their ears, unless I find her speedily."

"No, no; oh, no!" cried the Count of Leiningen. "No such rash violence, Ehrenstein. You may suspect much, but can prove nought against them."

"I can prove that one of them wedded my daughter to my sworn follower," cried the Count, "secretly, by stealth, and at an unlawful hour. He knew right well what he was doing, and he shall pay the penalty."

"Take counsel, take counsel," exclaimed the jester, "and I will show you a far better way to punish this meddling priest. Force him to marry a wife himself; and he will repent in sackcloth, I will warrant."

"You have no proof of the fact, as far as I have heard," said Count Frederick, "and

you may bring yourself into great danger. But 't is no affair of mine. I will attach myself to find this Baron of Eppenfeld; and he will lie closer than a hind beside her fawn, or I will find him."

"Perchance, in seeking him, you may find what would be to me a far more precious thing," replied the Count of Ehrenstein; "and I am sure that, in honour and good fellowship, if you should meet with either my rebellious child, or he who has seduced her from obedience to her father, you will send them back to me at once."

Count Frederick mused for an instant without reply, and then said, "Nay, not at once, Ehrenstein. Should they fall into my hands, I would fain give you time to let your wrath subside, and judge the case of Ferdinand of Altenburg more calmly."

"He or I shall die," answered the Count, sternly, interrupting his guest.

"But not without fair and free trial, if I have him in my custody," replied Count Fre-

derick, firmly; "that, at least, I will secure to him. We are all the slaves of our passions, Ehrenstein; and when we find an angry spirit stirring within us, we should take sureties against ourselves. For that reason was it that, in judging the guilty youth who died this morning, I called to my aid as many free and impartial voices as I could find. You do so too. At all events, if I take the youth, you shall have no cause to complain that justice is not done upon him. You shall have every means and every aid to prove the charge, and then to deal with him according to the laws and customs of the land."

"Good faith!" said the jester, "then shall he have hard measure and short time; for the laws are bitter enough, and the customs are expeditious. Thank Heaven! we nobles and jesters are above the laws."

"Not so," answered Count Frederick, while his host stood gloomy beside him, not very well contented with the restricted promise he

had received; "there are laws for nobles and even for jesters, Herr von Narren."

"Doubtless, doubtless, uncle," said the other; "I said not that there were not laws for all: I only said that we are above them; and that is true, as I can prove. First, the noble is so high above the law, that, long as is the arm of justice, it can never reach him. Secondly, so far is the law beneath the noble, that every day he tramples it under his feet."

"Too true, I fear," answered his lord. "But hark, Ehrenstein! I hear some of your people returning. Let us see what success they have had. Perchance they have caught the fugitives."

It was soon found, however, that no success had been obtained. The persons whom Count Frederick had heard passing the drawbridge were not of those who had been sent in pursuit of Adelaide; but ere an hour was over, two or three who had visited the abbey came back with the tidings that the monks denied the

lady had taken refuge there, but threatened loudly in regard to some violence shown by the Count's men to the windows of the chapel in the wood. The messenger added, that they seemed angry enough about something; for he saw vassals and tenants coming in armed, and horsemen sent out as if to call for further assistance. Other parties returned soon after, but yet no intelligence arrived of the fair fugitive; and the Count of Ehrenstein mused in silence, perhaps not quite so well contented as he would have wished to appear, that he could not take his measures unnoticed by the eyes of one whose frank and generous spirit, and calmer and more elevated mind, acted as a check upon him. Count Frederick, however, did not, or would not, see that his presence was in any degree a burden. He remained with his host, sometimes musing as he mused, sometimes counselling, sometimes discussing; or busied himself in ordering preparations for the pursuit of the Baron of Eppenfeld, by parties of his own band.

In the mean while, the jester kept close to the side of his lord and the Count of Ehrenstein; but he too seemed buried in deep reveries; and at length the last-named nobleman, as if in a fit of impatience, turned round, exclaiming, "Well, Herr von Narren, what do you meditate so profoundly? Is it to find that one wilful girl can baffle so many experienced men?"

"No, good lord," replied the jester, "it is rather to find that so many experienced men have not wit to take the means at hand for catching one truant girl."

"What would you?" cried the Count. "What means have I left untried?"

"There was once an old woman who lost a piece of money," said the jester, "and she looked all day for it in every part of her house, except her own pocket. Now the Lord of Ehrenstein is just like the old woman, for he looks for the lady in every part of the country except his own castle, which is just as good a place for hiding a rich thing as the old woman's pocket."

"By my honour! he says true," exclaimed Count Frederick; "all these three missing ones may even now be within a few yards of us, as far as I have seen any search made."

"I have had all the rooms above stairs well examined," replied the Count of Ehrenstein, thoughtfully; "except, indeed, your own, my noble friend; and there I did not dream that any one could be concealed. The mystery is, how these doors have been opened, the fugitives brought forth, and all made fast again. That there is treachery somewhere, no one can doubt; and those who released them from confinement would doubtless assist them in flight."

"That might not be so easy," replied Count Frederick; "but at all events let us search. There seem chambers and passages enough, here below, to hide a baron's train. It is quite possible they might find their way forth from the chambers where they were confined, and yet not be able to escape from the castle."

"That is a tempting door," said the jester,

pointing to that which appeared at the end of the hall near the chair of state. "The youth Ferdinand, when we were sitting here together watching the cold pies, lest the mice should make houses of them, talked familiarly of that door, and of the place beyond."

"Ha!" cried the Count of Ehrenstein, "said he that he had ever been there?"

"Nay, not so," replied the jester, "but he told me that it led to vaults, and to the serfs' burial-place,—very awful vaults, indeed, my noble lord, where nobody would venture; and he hinted how terrible deeds had been done there, which had begotten many ghosts. I am not sure he did not speak of devils too; but he was marvellous conversant with all that the place contained; and his was a bold heart, just fit to trust himself with spirits, good or bad."

"Come," cried the Count hastily, "we will search;" but he led the way from the door which had been the theme of the jester's conversation, and, followed by several attendants,

examined carefully every part of the building which had not been searched before, till he came to the door of the great hall again; but there he paused, and seemed unwilling to go farther.

"Let us on, Ehrenstein," said Count Frederick, "and make the work complete by looking through these vaults."

"They are not there," answered the Count, in a hesitating tone; "I feel sure they would not venture."

"What, not Ferdinand of Altenburg!" exclaimed Count Frederick; "I would gage a county against a flask of Ingelheim, that he would venture into an open grave sooner than any man should say he was afraid. I am some judge of men's courage; and few things would daunt that lad. If he knew that other men feared to tread those vaults, 't is the very reason he would seek refuge there."

The Count of Ehrenstein mused for a moment. There was truth in what his friend said; and he remembered, too, how little dread

his daughter had seemed to feel in trusting herself where others were afraid to stay for even a few minutes. There, too, in that very hall, she had been alone for some hours with Ferdinand of Altenburg; and the hope of finding them together in the gloomy asylum beyond, and punishing one at least upon the spot, filled him with a fierce kind of pleasure; but yet he hesitated. "I know not," he said, "but I doubt much, my noble friend, that we shall find any one to aid the search. All men here dread that place. Even this hall they hold in terror, from their superstitious fancies. Did you not see how, when the messenger came to tell me the answer of these daring monks, he hurried away like lightning as soon as his errand was told?"

"Nay, what matters it how many there be?" asked his guest. "Here are you and I, and our friend Herr Narren, who, I will answer for it, fears as little as we do."

"Oh, I am quite ready, uncle," cried the jester, "though I fear horribly; but fools are

privileged against ghosts; and as your band has no lack of fools, I think I can get three or four others to bear us company, though, doubtless, we shall have rare trembling and shaking as we walk along. There's Henry of Geisen, and his inseparable Fritz Munter; they will go. Here, lads, here! we want men who love knocking their heads against stone walls. Here is an enterprise worthy of you."

Henry of Geisen was ready to go wherever his lord went, and Fritz Munter would go wherever Henry of Geisen turned his steps. Two or three more were collected, who, though it cannot be said they showed no fear—for every one looked somewhat dull when the vaults were mentioned—did not hang back; and torches being procured, the Count of Ehrenstein, with a heavy brow and teeth hard set, approached the little door on the left of the dais. It was fixed as firm, however, as a piece of the wall, and did not seem to have been opened for years.

"Stay," said the Count, who, having made

his mind up to the examination, would not now be disappointed; "I will bring the keys."

When he returned, Count Frederick, who had been looking stedfastly at the pile of dust which time had accumulated before the door, pointed to the ground, saying, "There is a footmark."

"That is mine," cried the jester, setting his broad square cut shoe upon it. "I defy you to match that for a neat, tiny, little foot, in all the castle."

But the very fact of a footmark being so near the door confirmed the Count in his resolution of going on; and after some trouble, for the key was rusty with neglect, the door was opened, and a torch held up to light the way. On the whole party went, along the stone passage, down the well stairs, and then into the vault; but here it seemed as if all the noxious beasts of the place had leagued together to oppose their passage. Hundreds of bats flapped through the air, and, dazzled by the torches, swept close past the faces of the

intruders; enormous toads, bloated and slow, crept across the ground; two or three large snakes darted away, hissing and showing their forked tongues; long earth-worms, and hideous orange slugs, wriggled or crawled along the path; and a large mole cricket dashed itself in the eyes of one of the men, making him start back in terror.

Not a word passed the lips of the Count of Ehrenstein; but, instead of going straight forward, he led the way to the left, and made, by a circuitous course, for the side of the crypt under the chapel. Through it, too, he passed rapidly, till he reached the door leading out upon the hill, which he tried, and found fast locked and bolted.

"Now," he cried, "if they are here, we have them safe;" and he then applied himself to make his companions spread out and sweep the whole width of the vaults on the way back, so that the torches might light every part of the space—he himself keeping on the extreme right. But this he found difficult to accom-

plish: the men loved not to be separated; and only Count Frederick and the jester would take the places assigned to them,—the others keeping close together, and following one or other of the three. The torch-light, too, lost itself in the old darkness of the place, as soon as, having quitted the crypt, where the windows afforded some light, however dim, they entered the wider vaults where the serfs were buried; and often one person stopped, or another, as they went along, examining the various objects that met their eyes. The Count of Ehrenstein himself paused at a door on his right, and looked to ascertain that it was fastened; but he soon resumed his advance again, and had nearly reached the other side, when a voice, loud and commanding, suddenly cried, "Stand!"

Every one started, and there was a dead silence for an instant.

"Who spoke there?" demanded the Count of Ehrenstein. "Leiningen, was it you?"

"Not I," exclaimed Count Frederick. "It seemed to come from your side."

"I heard it on both sides," said the jester; "but that is natural, having two ears."

"Who spoke?" again asked the Count of Ehrenstein, raising his voice; but no one answered, and Count Frederick took a step forward. The next moment he exclaimed, "What, in Heaven's name, is this? Ehrenstein, Ehrenstein, come hither! What is this?"

The men crowded up to the spot where the nobleman stood. The Count of Ehrenstein came more slowly; but when he did come, he found his friend gazing at the skeleton chained to the stone column. That, however, was not the only object that met his eyes; for in the bony hand was a long strip of vellum, falling almost to the ground, and upon it in large characters, written apparently in blood, was the word "Vengeance!"

The Count paused, and gazed with his eyes straining from their sockets, his mouth half open, and his nostrils expanded; while beside him stood Count Frederick, and behind, the

jester, with his eyes bent upon his lord's entertainer, his lip quivering, and his brow knit into a dark and ominous frown. All kept silent for some time, and no one moved, unless indeed it was the jester, whose hand opened and shut more than once upon the hilt of his dagger. At length Count Frederick broke the terrible silence, and inquired, "What is this, Ehrenstein?"

The Count made no reply; and in an instant after he fell back, senseless, one of the soldiers catching him just as his head was about to strike the ground.

"Take him up, and carry him to his chamber," cried Count Frederick; "we have had enough of this;" and two of the men, raising the body of the Count, who sighed heavily, bore him on, while his friend followed, conversing in a low tone with the jester.

CHAPTER II.

"HALT!" cried, at length, the same voice which had more than once sounded in the ear of Ferdinand of Altenburg, during the eventful night of his escape from the castle of Ehrenstein, but now speaking in a louder tone than before; and the hands which still held the arms of the young fugitive somewhat relaxed their grasp. Ferdinand, however, had now a more definite idea of the place to which he had been brought; for during the time they had paused in the wood, and the half hour which had elapsed since they had resumed their rapid course, he had had time to collect his thoughts, which at first were confused with agitation and excitement. As soon as they began to move, he had perceived that they rapidly descended

the hill; and shortly after, though the cowl was far over his eyes, he caught the glistening of the river at a few steps distance. The next minute it became clear that they were passing over the bridge; and then they threaded tortuous ways, narrow and overgrown with briars and weeds, which, he was sure, could only lead to the old castle on the hill opposite to Ehrenstein.

When, at length, the voice cried "Halt!" as I have said, the young gentleman felt sure that they must be standing in one of the grass-grown courts or ruined halls of the dilapidated building. The stamping noise of tethered and impatient horses, too, was heard; and many whisperings, as of a number of men speaking in low tones, sounded around. All was as dark as the pit of Acheron, however; till suddenly a dull red glare found its way even under the cowl; and, a minute after, the same voice said aloud, "Bring him forward; leave the other—he is safe; but bring the last before me."

The hands which were holding Ferdinand but lightly now withdrew entirely, and there was a movement around. He profited by his freedom instantly to raise the hood from his head, and look abroad, when he found himself, as he had supposed, in the great court of the ruined castle; but he was, indeed, surprised to find it half filled with men. Each was cased in armour, like the followers of some feudal baron, and each had the visor of his helmet down, so that no face was visible; but in the midst of the party, seated on a mass of fallen stone-work, with a man holding a lighted torch a little in advance on one side, and another with a large two-handed sword, naked, on the other, was a being of gigantic stature, clothed from head to heel in jet black arms. The gauntlet, the casque, the very plume, were all dark as night; and a strange effect had the light of that single torch, as it showed that towering form, glistened upon the bare weapon, which was the only object that reflected its glare, picked out the black figures all around,

and then, as it faded away in the obscurity beyond, faintly illumined the crumbling towers and falling walls of the deserted stronghold.

But, the instant after, a figure was brought forward before the seated leader, which at once arrested all Ferdinand's attention; for at a glance he recognised the Baron of Eppenfeld.

Even now, though the scene and the circumstances were well calculated to strike terror even into a bold and resolute heart, the Baron maintained his air of rude and reckless daring, gazed round the groups in his neighbourhood, fixed his eyes upon the principal figure, looked at the swordsman with his naked weapon, and then, with a laugh, exclaimed, "Well, I am amongst comrades, it seems. We are all of a feather, doubtless, though I knew not there were so many eagles within a day's flight of my own eyry."

"Eagles, kite!" exclaimed the voice of the gigantic figure with the black plume. "You merit plucking for your insolence in comparing a carrion fowl like thyself to noble birds.

Listen, Baron of Eppenfeld, and answer before the court of the Black Rider; and mark well all that thou seest, and all that thou hearest. Look at that sword."

"I see it," answered the Baron; "it is long and strong, and in a good hand may do good service."

"The edge is sharp," replied the voice; "and ere half an hour be over that edge shall smite thy neck, if thou answerest not, or answerest untruly, any question that is asked."

"By the Lord! I am in no mood for answering questions," replied the Baron of Eppenfeld, who did not seem to apply the idea of death to himself with any great facility, or who perhaps doubted that the threat held out to him would be put in execution.

But the tone of him who spoke speedily removed all doubts. "Well, then," said the voice, "be it as you say. Kneel down, Baron of Eppenfeld. — Strike off his head, — but, first, smite the spurs from the heels of the felon!"

Before the Baron could turn round, or had time to say another word, the blow of an axe from some one behind struck away the marks of knighthood from his heels, the sharpest indignity that man could suffer in those days; and, while his heart beat, and his cheek grew red and white, the voice again exclaimed, "Kneel down!"

"Stay, stay," cried the Baron, now convinced that it was no jest they practised on him. "What are your questions?"

"Nay, no covenants," answered the Black Rider. "Here men answer, or do not answer, all that is asked of them. If they answer, well; they are safe from harm—if they answer not, they die. Such is my law. Once more, Wilt thou live or die?"

"Live, to be sure," cried the Baron. "Think you I would die while grapes grow beside the Rhine, or the roe deer bounds upon the mountain? Ask what you will, I will answer."

"Speak without pause or hesitation, then,"

said the Black Rider. "If he falter but at a word, sweep off his head. Now, mark well! Did the Count of Ehrenstein, some sixteen years ago, send you with your men to seize, near Ulm, a lady and her child?"

"He did," replied the Baron; "but 'tis well nigh seventeen years, I think."

"Did he give you a bond for the payment, in three years, of two thousand ducats for the deed?" asked the voice.

"Ay, did he; and he paid all but two hundred ducats," answered the Baron; "that, he would not pay till I proved that I had done all that he required."

"What more did he require than their mere seizure?" inquired the voice.

The Baron hesitated, and the Black Rider instantly exclaimed, "Strike him on the neck!" The swordsman raised his weapon; but the Baron exclaimed, "Stay, in Heaven's name! I did but think of all the matters. They are long gone."

"What more did he require?" thundered the voice.

"That I should plunge them in the Danube, as if by accident, and let them perish there," replied the Baron.

There was a pause of more than a minute, during which every one remained profoundly silent, and then the Black Rider demanded, "And did you do this deed?"

"No, on my life!" answered the Baron of Eppenfeld. "Nay more, I never intended to do it. I would have seized them, and kept them in some secret place, to bring them forth when the time served. But ——"

"Have you the bond?" asked the voice.

"Two days ago, I could have said Yes," was the Baron's answer; "but they have sacked and razed my castle, and all the papers—for there were letters many—have either been taken or burnt."

"Now, speak the truth," said the Black Rider; "Who has the papers?"

"Count Frederick of Leiningen had them,"

answered the Baron; "but, doubtless, he gave them to his worthy and right noble friend of Ehrenstein."

"What became of the child and the mother?" asked the voice again.

"I cannot tell," replied the captive. "They had received timely notice, it would seem, of my errand, and had fled ere I reached Ulm; but I have heard that both died of the fever at Regensburg, not a year after. It is true, too; for those who told me knew what they said. So I swore to the Count that they were dead; but because I could bring no one to prove that they perished in the Danube, he would not pay the rest, and I kept the bond."

"Who read to you the Count's letters, and wrote your answers," inquired his interrogator; "for you are no clerk yourself?"

"A shaveling—a priest I had with me then," said the Baron. "He had fled to me from Wurtzburg, where he had killed a man in a fray about a woman; but he is dead now, the

good clerk. He drank half a hogshead of red wine in a week, which made him so sleepy he never woke again."

"No more of him," cried the voice sternly. "So the mother and the child died of the fever. Now, speak; Who were they?"

"Nay, that I know not," said the prisoner. "All I know is what the Count told me, which was, that she was his dead brother's leman, and the boy a bastard, whom he did not believe even to be his brother's child. They wanted money from him, I fancy, on some old written promise of the last count—a thousand Venetian ducats yearly—so he told me; and he thought it best to give me two years of the payment, and have done with it for ever?"

"Is this all you know of this matter?" asked the Black Rider again.

"All, upon my life!" answered the Baron. "They are both dead—that is certain; but I had no hand in their death, I will swear upon the holy cross." The gigantic figure remained

motionless and silent for more than a minute, then waved his hand from right to left with a peculiar motion. The Baron turned his head, in some doubt whether he should not see the naked sword behind him taking the same direction towards his neck; but suddenly the man who held the torch reversed it, pressed the flaming end upon the ground, and the next moment all was darkness.

Ferdinand of Altenburg had listened in silence to all that had passed. There were many parts of this long interrogatory in which he felt a deep interest; but that interest was too keen, too overpowering, to suffer him, even by a word, to interrupt the course of the questions and replies. There was an awe upon him—he knew not well why—that would have kept him silent even had he not been listening eagerly for every syllable. It seemed as if the secret of his life were in the words then spoken. Sentence by sentence associated itself with other things within his knowledge. The scenes of his childhood rose up before him, the

flight in the night from a place, the name of which had long passed away from memory, but which instantly connected itself with Ulm, as soon as the word was pronounced. The house at Regensburg, and that name, too, and the death-bed of his mother when he was yet a child, with many another incident, breaking from spots in the past which had before seemed dark, like the sparks of fire wandering about in the half-extinguished tinder, were all brought up vividly before the mind's eye, till at length he was almost tempted to exclaim, "You are wrong. The mother did die, but the boy still lives." He would fain have asked some questions more; and, just as the torch was extinguished, he took a step forward, but instantly a hand was laid upon his arm, not grasping tight as before, but gently; and a voice whispered in his ear, "Not a word; but follow. A horse is ready for you, and we must ride far ere break of day."

Ferdinand scrupled not to obey, for he had been about to act upon impulse; and a mo-

ment's thought showed him that it would be better to say nothing. Turning, then, with the person who had spoken, and who still kept his hand lightly upon the young man's arm, he passed through a part of the crowd, every individual in which remained profoundly silent, and paused where the other paused, near the old ruinous gateway, through which the dark masses of the hills and woods around and below could be faintly seen in the dim night air. Suddenly there was a sound of moving feet and horses' hoofs; and man after man passed through the archway, till at length the person beside him said, "Now!" Ferdinand went on, the other followed; and when they issued forth, the young man saw a whole troop mounted, a number of horses held at a little distance, and two standing immediately in front.

"Go on, and mount," said the voice, in the same low tone.

Ferdinand advanced, without further question, and put his foot in the stirrup of the

foremost horse. The man who had the bridle in his hand said nothing, and the young gentleman vaulted into the saddle. His companion followed, and they then joined the group before them. Two more horses were next brought forward, other persons mounted, and at length the tall black figure came forth from the arch of the gate, leapt upon a charger a full hand higher than any of the rest, and then riding forward, past all those who were already in the saddle, put himself at the head of the troop. A signal was given from the front, the whole body began to move in exact order, and Ferdinand of Altenburg found himself forming a part of the band of the Black Huntsman.

CHAPTER III.

ADELAIDE was sad, though the words of the priest had, in some degree, allayed the anxiety she felt for him she loved; but yet she was sad—very sad. There were now other causes of depression weighing down her mind, which during the fever of apprehension she had not experienced. She now felt what it was to quit her father's house, a fugitive—under his anger —under, perhaps, his curse. There might indeed be matter of consolation in her thoughts; there might be a full justification of her conduct to her own heart. She might feel, or might believe, that she had done no wrong. Scanning her motives as severely as she could, she might, with a clear conscience, say, that not for any

personal feeling,—not for love, or from weakness, had she neglected a duty to a parent; that passion, or fancy, or attachment, had not shared, even in a degree, in what she had done. Though she loved as deeply as she was loved in return, and owned to her own heart that she had made no sacrifice of aught but the girl's timidity, still it was sad to quit the home of youth as an outcast. It weighed upon her that her father's last words to her should have been those of anger and bitterness; that the eye which had ever looked beaming upon her, even when it fell cold and harsh on others, should at length have blazed with rage as it rested on her face.

Apprehension, too, mingled with such painful sensations. What if the early discovery of all that had taken place should frustrate the object which had made her willing, eager in her consent? What if her absence, and that of her young husband, in a moment of peril, should leave her father exposed to the dangers from which she would fain have shielded him?

Her heart sank as she thought of it; and, moreover, she said to herself, with a sigh—for all women, and most men, think of the world's opinion, more or less—"People will believe that I have yielded to love for Ferdinand to disobey my father on the most vital point, and they will condemn me justly, and think my punishment hardly severe enough."

She felt very sad then: she could take no pleasure in the scenes through which she passed, though the green woods were everywhere pleasant to the eye, and often many a lovely spot peeped in upon her through the sloping chasms in the hills, as she went along. In vain Bertha, with gay talk, strove hard to win her from her heavy thoughts; and though the men who accompanied her were kind and civil in their rude way, yet nought could win a smile to poor Adelaide's lip.

The sun rose high, and looked down into the dells through which they wound along, gilding the banks of moss, and chequering the narrow road with waving fillagree work, of yellow

light and green shade. He began to sink behind the branches of the higher trees, and a cool, fresh air followed his decline. Through the most unfrequented parts of the wide forest, which stretched far along the hills, they took their way, avoiding village, and hamlet, and farm, and even keeping at a distance from the course of the stream. The paths they chose were those of the woodman or the hunter; but even the latter trod them so seldom, that more than once, from a thicket close at hand, the wild roe bounded away; and twice or thrice, where a shady glade opened into the heart of the wood, a stag was seen raising his antlered head, and gazing steadfastly at the unwonted sight of a cavalcade crossing his own habitual solitude.

At length, after four hours' slow riding, the man who seemed the leader of the little troop which had been sent to guard Adelaide on her way, drew in his horse, saying, "I think, lady, we must now be beyond all danger, and can well afford to halt for an hour to refresh our-

selves and our horses, under the trees, with the provisions which my lord, the Abbot, has bountifully supplied."

"If the horses need refreshment, let us stop," replied Adelaide: "I would not have the poor beasts misused for me; but you need not halt on my account: I do not need any repose, and am only anxious to proceed as fast as may be."

The good man, however, chose to take it for granted that the cattle did want food and rest, though they had fed well at the abbey, and had rested for some hours. Bertha, too, to say the truth, was right glad of some refreshment; for she had had a weary and an apprehensive night; and hers was a light heart, that forgot its fears as soon as danger was no longer very apparent.

Adelaide dismounted, then, as soon as she saw that it needs must be so; and seated on the turf, beneath a spreading beech tree, a plentiful meal was laid out before her, with some of the rich wines of the abbey; of which

good cheer her companions failed not to partake more plentifully than she did herself. The horses, tethered near, fed on some oats which had been brought for their need, and finished their meal upon the forest grass; and thus nearly an hour passed without any sign of an intention to move.

The sun where they sat was shining brightly upon a small open space in front, not a cloud seemed to shadow any part of the sky, and the tops of the distant hills, seen through the brake, appeared peculiarly sharp and clear. But, in the midst of this serenity, Adelaide's quick ear caught a peculiar rolling sound, coming apparently from a distance on the right, and starting up, she asked, "Is not that thunder?" adding, "let us go on quickly, I pray you, sir."

"Oh, 't was but the wind amongst the trees, lady," answered the man, hardly moving a limb: but his assertion was contradicted a moment after by a louder and a nearer peal.

All was now bustle and hurry. The horses

were prepared in haste, the remnants of the meal packed up, and the whole party mounted. But scarcely had Adelaide advanced a hundred yards, when a bright flash broke across the path; and, ere she had gone half a mile, the rain poured down in torrents. The leader of her little troop was now really kind: often and anxiously he looked back towards her; would fain have stripped himself of his cloak to defend her better from the large, heavy drops that, as they fell, went through and through the gown of black serge which she wore above her ordinary dress; and sent two men away, to the right and left, to see if they could find any cottage, or woodman's hut, which would afford a covering from the storm. A shed was at length discovered, and there two weary hours were passed, till the lady declared, looking up to the sky, that she would rather proceed, notwithstanding the continued rain, than delay her journey longer. The leader of the troop was not unwilling, and, after a short pause, they again began their march, and pro-

ceeded for a mile, or somewhat more, uninterrupted. The rain still poured upon their heads, and, far from affording any shelter, the trees seemed but to collect the water amongst the branches, and then let it fall in larger drops upon the travellers as they passed. But at length they seemed to approach the verge of the wood; for, through the avenue of tall beeches which they were now pursuing, Adelaide could see an open field of green corn, with some shrubs and scattered brushwood beyond again, though the grey film of heavy drops, which hung like a thin curtain over all the distant objects, prevented her from distinguishing anything clearly. It was evident, however, that the leader of the band thought they were approaching a point of some danger; for he sent on one of his horsemen a little in advance, to reconnoitre the ground, and followed more slowly, as if unwilling to advance till he had received intelligence. The man returned in a minute at full speed, and said something, in a low tone, which the lady

did not distinctly hear. Instantly, however, the leader turned to her, exclaiming, "Ride back, lady, with your woman. There are armed men in front, who, he thinks, have seen him: ride back to the shed. We will ——"

But, ere he could finish his sentence, or Adelaide could ask any questions, there was the sound of many horses' feet beating the plashy ground at a quick pace; and, looking between the shoulders of the horsemen who were in front, the lady saw a number of mounted men coming rapidly down the road. All was, in a minute, confusion and bustle: Adelaide's male companions hastening to spread out across the road before her, at once to conceal her flight and to prevent pursuit. Without waiting to see more, she drew her rein in terror, and urging her horse into its quickest pace, dashed away till she reached the narrow turning which led to the small woodman's shed, up which she instantly directed her course, nor stopped till she saw the rough hut, with its thatched roof raised upon

six bare poles. There, however, she paused, and looked behind, thinking that Bertha was following; but the girl was not to be seen.

The lady listened; but for a moment no sound was heard: then the quick trampling of horses' feet reached her ear; and Adelaide fancied that Bertha was coming; but the beasts and their riders passed by the end of the little path,—at least she believed that they must have done so, for no one appeared, and the sounds grew gradually fainter and more faint, till at length they died away. The poor girl's heart sank. What had become of her companions? she thought; what had become of Bertha? Had they met with her father's soldiery, and been routed and driven back? and was she left there, in the midst of the wood, alone, and without help or guidance? Every fearful image that fancy could call up presented itself to her mind; and, though Adelaide was not faint-hearted, yet, for a time, her courage failed at the thought of all that might occur to her under such circumstances.

She struggled against her terrors, indeed,—she would not dwell upon the dangers; and she was nerving her mind to consider calmly what it was best for her to do, when again the trampling sound of horse was heard; and, leaving the beast that bore her, under the woodman's shed, she drew back amongst the trees, and listened. The next moment a loud voice exclaimed, as if shouting to some distant companions, "Here; the hoofs have turned up here. Come on, come on!"

It was evidently not one of the party which had accompanied her from the abbey who was now seeking her, for they knew whither she had gone; and the lady drew further back, still hiding herself amongst the wet trees and bushes, yet leaving herself just room to see what passed on the open spot around the shed. The boughs had hardly ceased waving where she had pushed them aside, when, first a single soldier, leading his horse by the bridle, appeared, and then two or three others, mounted. Their faces were strange to her; they were none of the men of

Ehrenstein; but that they were seeking her, soon seemed clear, for one of them exclaimed, "Ah, here's the girl's horse—take care; don't frighten it;" and, bending down low, behind the bushes, Adelaide remained as still as death; but with a beating heart. What more was said she did not hear, though the men remained some time, and seemed to converse eagerly: but that which appeared most strange was, that, as far as she could see, they made no attempt to search the copses around; and at length, mounting their horses again, rode quietly, but quickly, away.

For several minutes, she did not venture to raise her head; but when at length she did so, and looked towards the shed, she saw that the jennet which had brought her thither was gone. At first her brain seemed to swim with terror, and her knees shook violently. Alone, in a part of the country which she did not know, without any means of proceeding but such as her own weary and trembling limbs afforded—surrounded, perhaps, by those who were

seeking to carry her to an imprisonment which would almost be worse than death—or in the midst of wild, lawless bands, which were but too numerous in those days,—with night fast approaching, and no shelter near but the wide wood, what was she to do?—whither was she to go?—where could she find refuge?

Such agonizing thoughts rushed rapidly through her mind, and it was long ere she could calm herself sufficiently to reflect upon any plan of action. At length, however, she remembered the green corn which she had seen growing at the opening of the road, and she thought, too, that her eyes had rested upon the foliage of the vine. Such signs of cultivation implied the proximity of some careful hands, and as these things recurred to her, hope began to revive.

"I will wait," she said, at length, "till night begins to fall, and then quietly find my way forward, and seek out the peasant's dwelling who has tilled those fields. Though rude, the boors are kind-hearted; and I am sure they

will give me shelter for the night, and, perhaps, help me on my way to-morrow."

She seated herself, therefore; and, though still grieved, anxious, and sad, confidence in some degree returned. She prayed, and her heart felt strengthened and comforted. The nightingale broke out into song, in a tree overhead. A timid hare ran along before her—paused, and stood erect with lifted ears—ran on—paused again and listened more than once before it was lost to her sight; and Adelaide thought, "Why should not I, frightened, and in danger, like this poor beast, follow its example, and make my way forward with the same careful caution?"

She resolved to do so; and rising, she crept back to the small path that led from the woodman's shed to the wider road which she had lately been travelling, and then gazed along it as far as the eye could reach. Nothing was visible; though in the cool evening light, with the sun just upon the horizon, shining out from beneath the exhausted clouds, she could see

clearly as far as a spot about two hundred yards in advance, where the path, taking a turn, was lost amongst the trees. With a cautious step she went on, pausing to listen every minute, till she gained a sight of the continuation of the little way. All was still clear; but yet she feared to trust herself in the wider road, which she could now perceive crossing the path she was following; and, drawing somewhat back behind an oak, she watched eagerly for a moment or two, while the sun sank, the rosy light that tinged the clouds overhead died away, and the gray shadow of the coming night was cast upon the earth.

"I must go on," she said to herself; but still she dreaded to do so, and did not move, till suddenly a tall hart came slowly trotting down the road, passed the end of the path in which she was, after standing for a moment to gaze, as if considering which way he should take, and disappeared in the very direction in which she was proceeding.

"There is no one there," thought the poor

girl; "the beast's instinct shall serve my weaker sense, and give me courage to go on."

Without further hesitation she went upon her way, turned up the road to the right, and followed it quickly, for the light was failing fast. Night had completely closed in ere the trees ended; and she found herself standing by a field of green corn, with what seemed a little patch of vineyard on a slope beyond, and a dim line of trees farther forward still. The stars were out in the sky above, for by this time the stormy clouds had cleared away; but there was, in the scene, a pleasanter light to the eye of the poor wanderer, than even the twinkling lamps of heaven. At some distance to the right, were seen a number of what she concluded were cottage windows, with rays, as if from fires or candles within, streaming forth upon the darkness; and, at her side, she saw the commencement of a path, apparently leading to the village or hamlet.

She was very weary; but that sight gave her strength; and, with a quickened pace, she hur-

ried on. The lights grew more distinct as she advanced, and she caught a faint glimpse of the buildings before her. There were cottages, evidently, and a little church; but a larger and more imposing edifice appeared on the left. It might be a stronghold—it might be a monastery or convent; and Adelaide tried to recollect all she had heard of the places in the neighbourhood, in order to divine what the building could be that now rose before her eyes, towering higher over the trees every step, as she came nearer. She knew not, however, how far she had gone, or what direction she had taken, and she only puzzled herself with conjectures, till she arrived at the first house of the village, which stood a little in advance of those tall walls, from which no light proceeded. From two windows of the lesser building, indeed, the friendly rays were streaming plentifully; and Adelaide determined to pause there, and ask for shelter; but she found some difficulty in approaching it. It was a small house, within a garden, apparently neither the

cottage of a peasant, nor the dwelling of farmer; for there was a low wall round the garden, and that wall, again, was surrounded by a foss, full of water. It did not seem, indeed, defensible against any large force; but it was, at all events, guarded against the sudden attack of maurauders; and Adelaide thought she could see the wall winding along till it joined that of the larger building behind. On the side next to her she could find no entrance, nor any means of passing the moat; but when she had walked on, round the angle of the wall, there appeared a little wooden bridge, and a door, with the masonry raised several feet on either side, so that no one approaching by the bridge could leap over into the garden. By the side of the door was the large iron pulley of a bell; but the young wanderer paused, doubting whether she should ring there, or go on to one of the cottages a little further up the hill. She was very weary, however; her limbs felt powerless; her heart was faint; and with a feeling like despair, she put forth her hand and rang the bell.

The next minute she heard a door open within the enclosure, and a step cross the garden. Then a wooden shutter was drawn back from before a small aperture in the gate, barred with iron; and a voice asked, "Who is there?"

It was a woman's tongue; and oh, how sweetly it sounded in Adelaide's ears!

"I have lost my way in the wood," she replied, "and have suffered much. I am wet, weary, and faint, and I pray you give me shelter for the night, in Our Lady's name."

"Are you alone, poor thing?" asked the woman.

"Quite," answered the lady: "I was not alone in truth, for I had some men from the abbey of ——" She paused, and omitting the name, went on—"from the abbey, with me and my maid; but we were met by an armed band, who attacked us, and I fled. Since then I have wandered on, and know not where I am."

The woman uttered a short exclamation, as

of surprise; but she opened the door quickly, and Adelaide, the moment after, stood in a little garden pleasantly laid out in walks covered over with vines trained upon poles.

CHAPTER IV.

"Your steps totter, poor child," said the woman who opened the gate to Adelaide; "here, lean upon my arm; but first let me make fast the door. We live in strange bad times; but here you will be safe, if there is safety to be found; for no one will venture to assail the Convent of the Holy Cross, or those who live beneath its walls."

Adelaide made no reply; for there are moments when the motives for exertion having ceased, the very relief from terror and anxiety is in itself overpowering, and the corporeal frame yields at the instant of deliverance to the weight it had borne up under during the period of peril. She perceived by a faint light, which streamed from the half open door of the

house, that the person who spoke to her was not habited in the garb of a nun, although she mentioned the convent as her assurance of security; but Adelaide could ask no question, make no reply. Everything seemed indistinct and misty; the gardens, with the rays from the windows and the door pouring in long lines through the green leaves of the vine, swam before her eyes; her limbs lost their power, her tongue clove to her mouth, and it was with difficulty that, aided even by the woman's arm, she reached the threshold of the house. Her companion pushed the door further open; and supported her up the little step, but at the top the poor girl leaned more heavily still upon her guide's arm, and the next instant sank gradually, and even slowly, down to the ground; while the old woman held her up as well as she could, calling to some one within for assistance.

In an instant two other figures were added to the group, one coming from a room on the right hand, and another from the back of the house. The former was that of a lady, per-

haps forty years of age, though she looked somewhat older; for her dress was not one calculated to conceal the effects of time, or to set off the lingering beauties that years had spared, to the greatest advantage. It was all of black, except the head gear, which was snowy white, and brought far down over the broad fair brow, almost entirely hiding the hair. The colours were those common to many orders of nuns; and there was something in the form of the dress itself which was in a degree conventual, so that, at first sight, one might have taken her for a recluse; but at the second glance one detected many differences from the garb of any established sisterhood. There was no actual veil, a small portion of the hair was seen; there were rings upon the fingers, and though a cross and rosary were hanging at the girdle, there was a locket round the neck hanging by a gold chain. The other person seemed a superior servant; but poor Adelaide saw none of those things, and when first she opened her eyes again, she found herself in a small chamber

furnished with much taste and some luxury. There was tapestry on the walls, not representing figures, as was so frequently the case; but divided into panels by tall columns worked in the web and covered with arabesques, while in the centre of each panel appeared an exquisitely executed group of flowers. All the moveable furniture was formed of some dark wood beautifully carved, and the sombre hue of the material was relieved by rich crimson velvet here and there, while a fine mirror, and two small but beautiful pictures of the very early school, which began, or perhaps I may almost say preceded, the revival of the arts, were sustained against the walls by poles of iron gilt thrust through the tapestry. As the poor girl recovered more fully, she saw an elderly woman-servant kneeling at the end of the bed on which she was laid, assiduously rubbing her feet, while over her bent a face which seemed to her almost that of an angel, and a soft hand bathed her temple with some fine essences.

"Thank you. Oh, thank you," she said,

as soon as she could speak; "how kind you are."

"Hush!" said the lady of the house; "not a word at present, my dear child. You will soon be well again, and then you shall speak. Bring a little wine, Biancha, and some dry garments, for these are still wet."

Adelaide took her hand and pressed it in her own; and the servant hastened away for the things she had been ordered to procure. The nun's gown which Adelaide had worn throughout the day had been already taken off, and she now lay in the ordinary dress of a woman of high rank, which was more distinctly marked from the garments of the lower orders in those days than at present. Her station, therefore, could not be doubted; but yet in the look of deep interest with which the lady gazed upon her, there seemed something more than the mere compassion which might well be felt for one accustomed to every comfort and refinement, exposed suddenly to hardships, dangers, and fatigues, and sinking under them. It was a long, thoughtful, wist-

ful look that she fixed upon her. It seemed to scan her face, and ask deep questions of her heart and mind. It was rather, as if it said, what is beneath that lovely countenance? what spirit is within that graceful form? than merely, what are you? what is your name and place in the cold order of this world's classes? But when the poor girl pressed her hand, and looked up with eyes full of petition as well as thanks, the lady smiled sweetly; and yet some drops gathered in her eyes, and one or two rolled over and bedewed her cheek. Then, bending down her head — perhaps in some degree to hide the tears — she kissed the marble forehead that lay beneath her eyes, and whispered, "You will soon be better.—Hush!—Be patient for a while; we will talk more anon."

The voice was very musical, soft, low, and sweet, with a slight foreign accent; but still so expressive of kindness and tenderness, that had it even used an unknown language, Adelaide would have understood right well its tones of sympathy.

"I am well, now, indeed," she murmured; "and I must thank you from my heart, dear lady, for your kindness."

"Fie!" said her companion; "if you would thank me really, lie still till you have taken some nourishment. Then you shall speak, and tell me all that has befallen you. Oh! here is Biancha — Now take a little wine. Dip a morsel of bread in it first, and swallow that. Then sip the rest. It will not do you harm."

Adelaide followed her directions, shaking her head, however, with a smile, and saying, "It was not food I wanted, but rest and peace."

"Peace!" said the lady, with a melancholy look; "is there such a thing on earth? Alas! my child——"

But she did not finish the sentence; and after her fair guest had taken the wine, she aided the maid to change the wet garments, and put on some loose clothing for her, which, if it fitted not quite well, at least felt warm and comforting.

"Now lie and rest," said the lady, "and tell me how this has been. The girl who let you in says, that you were travelling under the guard of some men from the abbey—What abbey did she mean?—that near Ehrenstein?"

"The same," answered Adelaide; but she paused there and hesitated, looking at the maid.

The lady seemed to comprehend her hesitation at once, and said, "Leave us, Biancha;" and when she was gone, she added, "You might trust her, my child. She is faithful and true—ay, and discreet, as she has proved herself through many a year. And so you separated from your guides, and lost your way in the foul day we have had? How did that happen?"

"At the edge of the wood, hard by," answered Adelaide, not anxious to be questioned too closely upon other subjects, "they saw a party of armed men, who seemed about to attack them; and they told me, with the maid, to ride back and wait at a woodman's

shed, where we had found shelter some time before from the storm. I rode away in terror, thinking that Bertha followed; but—how or why, I know not—she never came. I fear the men of the abbey were attacked and discomfited, for I heard horses galloping furiously past, as if in flight and pursuit; and soon after they came up towards the place where I was, and I fled amongst the trees, on foot, and watched them from behind the bushes. They did not seek for me far; but took away my horse, which I had left standing, weary, there. Thus it was that I was forced to find my way onward alone, with night coming on."

"And whither were you going, my child?" asked the lady, gazing at her face somewhat earnestly.

Adelaide hesitated, but she could not well evade the question; and she answered at length, in a low tone, "To Heiligenstein, lady."

"And who sent you thither?" was the next question.

"One of the good Fathers of the abbey,"

replied Adelaide, "who has been very kind to me and mine. His name is Father George."

The lady instantly cast her arms around her, and kissed her tenderly. "You are at Heiligenstein, my child," she whispered; "and it was to me that George of Altenburg sent you. Rest in peace, dear Adelaide; rest in peace. You are with a mother."

Adelaide returned her embrace gratefully; but then raised her eyes, and gazed inquiringly in the lady's face. Strange, mingled emotions thrilled through her bosom, not to be told, not to be separated. She saw a likeness to features that she knew and loved; she saw a likeness in the expression; she saw it in the peculiar light of the eyes. The tones of that lady's voice, too, were like his; and she had said to her, his bride, "You are with a mother." "But yet how could that be?" she asked herself. Ferdinand's mother had been long dead, she had been told; he himself believed that it was so. Even Father George, when revealing to her much of his history (more, indeed, than her lover knew himself), had

never mentioned the existence of that parent; and yet there was something which made Adelaide still believe that she was indeed with the mother of him she loved. To hear the lady call Father George by the name which he had long ceased to use, did not surprise her at all; for both from words which he had himself spoken, and from the contemptuous epithet which her father had applied to Ferdinand, she was already aware that the monk was a member of that high house; but all her thoughts turned to the one question, Who was the kind and gentle being that sat beside her?

What is like thought? Nothing that ever was created or devised. Rapid as the lightning, but yet not like it; not one broad glare extinguished as soon as seen, but full of combinations, rushing through innumerable channels, working out a thousand permanent results. Though in its process and celerity of operation, it has been well called "the lightning of the mind," it can, in all its attributes, be compared to nothing that earth has seen. All that

I have related, and much more, passed through Adelaide's mind, and yet it required but the short interval occupied by the return of the caress which the lady gave her, for her thus to commune with herself. The pause was but momentary, and then the lady added, as if she had hardly stopped, "I will be to you as a mother, dear child."

Those few words rendered all the poor girl's conclusions once more vague and undefined. It might be but a form of speech she had used, Adelaide thought; and Adelaide mused.

"And are you like your father?" asked the lady at length; after having gazed for a minute or two on the countenance of the fair creature before her, while the long, dark lashes of the downcast eyes rested on her cheek as she meditated.

"I do not know," answered Adelaide, looking suddenly up. "You do not know him, then?"

"I never saw him," replied the lady, thoughtfully, and even gravely; but after a moment

she went on—"We will ask each other no more questions, dear girl. Here you can stay in safety and peace. That is enough for the present; all the rest will soon be explained; and between two agitated and apprehensive hearts, like yours and mine, it is better only to speak of things that may tranquillize and reassure us."

"And are you, too, agitated and apprehensive?" asked Adelaide. "How, then, can I rest here in peace?"

"Agitated! ay, and full of fears, I am, indeed," answered the lady; "but they are not such as affect you, my child. If it is for Ferdinand you fear, doubt not that he is safe, for I have had assurance of it; if for yourself, set your mind at rest, for though this house may seem but an insecure asylum against the pursuit of those who would take you hence, yet, first, they know not where you are; and next, by the side of the very bed on which you lie, is a door that leads at once within the convent walls. That place is holy, and those walls are strong. If there be men daring

enough to try to force them, there is power at hand to resist. Now, my child, I will leave you to repose; for it is that which you most need. Sleep—and Heaven's best benison be upon you!"

Carefully and kindly the lady shaded the lamp, but left it still burning, placed a little silver bell by Adelaide's side, and assuring her that if she needed aught, she had but to ring, and it would be instantly brought to her, she kissed her with motherly tenderness, and left her.

Adelaide leaned her head upon her hand; but her thoughts were all bewildered with the events just passed. There are moments when the mind is too busy for sleep to still its wild activity, but when the agitation of the heart renders thought vain and fruitless. She could not think,—she could not sleep: she could only feel. She was then, for the first time, absent from her father's dwelling. She was the bride of a single day, with her bridegroom absent she knew not where. She was a fugitive among strangers, who were kind and gentle to

her; but who they were she knew not. She had passed through dangers and fatigues such as she had never endured before; and who could say when they might be renewed? How could she either sleep or think when such impressions were all fresh upon her? and there she lay till hour after hour had passed by,—till the convent bell sounded midnight, and all seemed still and at rest but the heavy marker of the passing time. Just then, however, she heard a dull sound like the trampling of horses, and terror began to take possession of her again. The sound came nearer and more near, and she stretched out her hand to ring the bell which had been left by her side, when suddenly rose up a strain of rich harmony in the midst of the darkness and stillness of the night. Adelaide heard but little of the lay, but thus sang a number of wild but fine voices, as the cavalcade passed by:—

SONG.

"The world's all at peace, and the sunshiny earth
Is teeming with riches and joy;
And each passing minute to pleasure gives birth,
And manhood's as gay as the boy.

"Now hark to the sound
Of the horn and the hound,
As they waken the valley and wood:—
Hide your head, hide your head,
From the march of the dead!
'T is the giant Black Huntsman is riding afar;
'T is the blast of the trumpet,—the grim dogs of war;
And the land shall be deluged in blood:
Hide your head!"

CHAPTER V.

It was a gloomy meal, the dinner at the castle of Ehrenstein; and would have been gloomier still, had it not been for the presence of one of those persons who in that age were privileged to mingle jest, if not mirth, with every event of life's chequered course, and make the wedding or the funeral alike the occasion of their wild satire. A number of the troops of Leiningen had gone forth to scour the country round in pursuit of the fugitive Baron of Eppenfeld; but Count Frederick himself had been persuaded, somewhat more easily than his host had expected, to remain till after the mid-day meal. A few courteous entreaties were all that the frank old nobleman required; and whether

they were sincere or not, he evidently received them as such, saying that he could well trust his good riders to trap an old fox, though it might have grown gray in its cunning; but that, if they had not succeeded by two hours after noon, he would mount himself.

All was hurry and confusion during the morning, however; and the castle looked more like a fortress, the garrison of which expected immediate attack, than the dwelling of a high noble in a time of peace. Parties were hourly coming in or going forth, messengers arrived or were despatched continually, and even the hall and the festive board were not free from business and importunity. The brow of the Count of Ehrenstein remained as black as night; nothing could move his lip to a smile; and as he sat at the head of the table in the lesser hall, with a greatly diminished party around, his very look spread gloom over the feast, and saddened the gayest hearts present.

Count Frederick strove to comfort and console him; but the Lord of Ehrenstein heard his

words in silence, or replied in monosyllables. The priest ate the rich food and drank the fine wine, without venturing more than a few words in praise of both; the knights sat round, and partook of their good cheer, with only a whisper amongst themselves now and then; and no one spoke but the jester, who, as usual, held on his captious course, as if nothing had occurred to interrupt the merriment; or, at least, as if he were in utter ignorance that such had been the case.

Those were days of privilege, when every prescriptive right, however ridiculous and sometimes iniquitous it might be, was reverenced as a part of a great system; and even the privilege of the jester was held so sacred, that any man who ventured to show serious anger at what he might say, would have been considered either as a fool or a tyrant. Thus our friend, on the present occasion, ventured, without the least fear, to touch upon all those subjects which were most painful to the master of the dwelling; sometimes wondering if the Lady Adelaide fared as

well in the fields as they did in the castle, sometimes choosing to suppose that Ferdinand of Altenburg must have gained a goodly appetite by his early walk.

At length he exclaimed, looking round, "How silent you are, noble cousins! I know that it proceeds from your admiration for my rich talk; so, to improve your manners, I will give you a lecture upon morals. What is the cause of young men getting into all sorts of mischief? Answer, or I will answer for you."

"Want of sense," replied Count Frederick: "it can be nothing else."

"Wrong, uncle—ever wrong," cried the jester; "for then would old men get into mischief, too. God love you! there is as little sense under a gray beard as under a brown one, and more than either under none at all. Look you now, the Lady Adelaide has more sense than her father, though she has no beard, and he has a long one; and then he has more sense than I have, and his beard is but gray,

while mine is white. Try again, uncle, try again."

"I have you now," answered the Count: "it is want of experience, you would say."

"Wrong once more," answered the jester. "See you not that those who have had most experience still do foolish things. Who would have thought that an armed lord, with well nigh five hundred men in his train, would have trusted sundry sacks of gold to be carried by peaceful merchants, when he could have brought it himself? No, no, uncle: 't is the great fault of all men—want of faith."

"Nay, but, Herr von Narren, this is a lecture on religion, not on morals, then," replied his lord.

"Not a whit, not a whit," cried the jester. "Want of faith in all things is bad; but I dabble not with religion. Let the cobbler stick to his awl: I am a moralist and philosopher, not a priest; and yet I say it is want of faith that gets young men into mischief; for, did we believe what those who have tried tell

those who have not tried, we should 'scape many a danger. But we never do believe in this world; we always think that we shall be better off than our neighbours, and therefore wish to try for ourselves. Is not that morality for you now? And see how it is proved every day. Cage your bird for its own good, and it will beat itself to death to get out; or, leave the door open for a minute, and it flies away to be pecked to death by the first hawk it meets. Is it not so, good Count of Ehrenstein?"

"Faith! I do not know," replied the Count; "but this I do know, that if some birds, who have escaped from *my* cage, fall into my hands again, I will wring their heads off."

"So do men get bloody fingers," answered the jester; "but, after all, who is there among us that has not some stain upon his hand? No one except myself, I warrant. There is a lily palm, with not a drop of Christian blood upon it; and as for the gore of a few stray Saracens, that but cleanses a man's fingers; as

a farmer's maiden uses sand, which is dirt, to scrub her father's floor."

The Count of Ehrenstein's brow had become doubly dark, but he ventured to give no other sign of his anger at the words of a mere jester; and turning to a man who entered, booted and spurred, just at the conclusion of Herr Narren's speech, he inquired, "Well, what news? Are there any tidings of them?"

"None, my good lord," answered the man; "all the world are so busy with other thoughts, that they seem to have paid no attention to anything but one."

"Ay, and what is that one?" said Count Frederick, turning to the messenger also.

"Why, the Black Huntsman is out again, my lord," said the man; "and old Sickendorf sent me back to let my lord know that all the country is ringing with his doings. He rode all the way down the valley last night, and some say, went down to the Rhine, while others will have it, that he turned towards Zweibrucken."

"Then we must make ready for war, I suppose," replied Count Frederick; "but is the news quite sure?"

"Oh, quite," answered the messenger; "we counted more than a hundred horses' feet all the way along the dusty old road upon the top of the hills."

"Did they stop at the abbey?" asked the Count of Ehrenstein, with a sneering smile.

"No, my lord; they left it far to the left," was the man's answer, "keeping along amongst the hills, until we lost them in the wood, some six miles off."

"Well, let it come," said the Count musing, and speaking rather to what was passing in his own thoughts, than in reference to anything that had been said by others; "let it come. It shall go hard, if the tide of war flows through this valley, but that one of the waves shall sweep away the walls of the abbey—ay, and all that are within;" he muttered between his teeth.

"My lord, my lord!" cried a man, who was

seated near the window; "here comes news at length, or I am mistaken. Some one galloping like mad up from the bridge."

"Bring him up quick, as soon as he arrives," cried the Count of Ehrenstein, turning to the attendants behind him; and the meal resumed its course for a few minutes; though few of those principally interested in the events which had taken place during that morning and the preceding night, showed any great appetite for the dainties before them.

At length, quick steps were heard in the outer chamber, and the two Counts turned their faces towards the door with the eager look of expectation. Some of the servants of the castle were the first that appeared; but immediately behind them was a stranger, dressed in the garb of the middle orders, and offering nothing very remarkable, either in his person or apparel. The Count of Ehrenstein, as was not unusual with him, fixed his eyes for a moment on the new comer, without speaking. It seemed, as if he loved to question men's

faces, and to read the character in the countenance before he ventured anything in words himself. It is not an unfrequent habit with all men of dark and subtle natures; but before he could speak on the present occasion, the person who thus sought his presence, looked inquiringly from his countenance to that of Count Frederick of Leiningen, and then asked, "Which is the Count of Ehrenstein?"

"I am he," replied the Count; "what would you with me, sir?"

"I bring you this letter, my lord," answered the man; "I was told to deliver it with all speed."

The Count took it, gazed thoughtfully at the superscription, and then raising his eyes to the man's face, demanded, "Who gave you this?"

"Faith! my good lord, I do not know," replied the man; "it was a young gentleman, of a fair countenance, and a good bearing, some twenty years of age or so; and he gave me ten crowns out of his purse, to carry it to you with all speed."

"Had he any one with him? Was he on foot or on horseback?" inquired the Count.

"Quite alone, my lord," answered the man; "but he rode as fine a horse as ever carried knight or noble."

The Count made no observation, but opened the letter and read. Then laying it down upon the table by his side, he laid his hand upon it, and seemed lost in thought; but after a moment, he pushed the paper over to Count Frederick, saying, "Read, my friend, read; for it concerns you too. Methinks this youth is bold, or else backed by means we know not of."

Without reply, Count Frederick took the letter, and read as follows:—

"FERDINAND OF ALTENBURG TO THE COUNT OF EHRENSTEIN, WITH HUMBLE AND RESPECTFUL GREETING.

"MY LORD THE COUNT,

"Finding myself in peril within the walls of your castle, and doubting that you would give me other judgment than that of your own court, which, as a stranger of noble birth, not

born upon the lands of Ehrenstein, I am not lawfully subject to, I have thought fit to take such means of escape as were at hand, and have used them to good purpose. Nevertheless, I wish you to know that in thus flying from the castle of Ehrenstein, I have no will or purpose to escape from fair trial and judgment of my guilt or innocence, by a free and open court of knights or gentlemen of good degree, and that I am ready to submit myself to such, in any sure place, when I shall be certified that I shall have impartial judgment. I am now upon the lands of Leiningen, and will there remain, claiming protection of that noble prince, the Count Frederick, but ready at all times to appear before a court summoned anywhere within his jurisdiction, and consisting, in at least one-half, of persons who are not retainers of the Count of Ehrenstein. To their decree, I shall bow without appeal, in all matters between you and me, provided you also pledge yourself to abide by their decision, whatever it may be.

"A summons to appear, according to the terms of this letter, with the guarantee of Count Frederick, that they shall be duly observed, will meet my eye, if hung upon the gates of the castle of Hardtenburg, and I will appear accordingly, at the place and time appointed."

Such was the tenor of the letter now laid before Count Frederick of Leiningen; and after he had read it, he mused several minutes without commenting upon its contents, till an impatient "Well!" from the Count of Ehrenstein roused him from his reverie.

"You think the letter bold, Ehrenstein," he said; "but in this you are not impartial. To me it seems fair enough. One who is willing to submit himself to the free judgment of unbiassed men, can be conscious of no great wrong."

The Count of Ehrenstein clenched his hand tight as it lay upon the table, till the veins and sinews seemed starting through the skin, and he muttered between his teeth, "You too, Leiningen!"

Count Frederick took no notice of the reproachful words; but calmly inquired, "What say you, my good friend? Will you accept the terms?"

"Your wishing me to do so, my lord the Count," replied the master of the castle somewhat sternly, "shews that you are not disposed to act the more friendly part, and aid me in hunting down the treacherous hound, as I would do with you in similar circumstances. Think you, that if a follower of your house had injured you as deeply as this youth has injured me, that I would not pursue him through my lands till I had caught him, and then give him up to you, to deal with at your pleasure?"

"I would not ask you, Ehrenstein," replied Count Frederick, coldly; "justice and fair dealing have ever been my motto. He offers to submit to justice, and I will have no hand in refusing it to him. If you will accept his terms, well; I will name four honest men to judge him, and you shall name an equal

number. Doubt not, if he have committed the crime with which you charge him, they will pronounce due sentence on him, and I will see it executed; but if he can free himself of the charge, God give him good deliverance! Once more, what say you?"

"What must be, must be," answered the Count; "and as I can have no better, I will take these terms."

"Well, then," replied Count Frederick, rising, "I will see that notice be duly given on the gates of my castle of Hardtenburg, and will appoint what place and hour you may think fit. When shall it be, and where?"

The Count of Ehrenstein thought for a moment or two, and then said, "To-morrow, at midnight, if you will. Then for the place—you know the large old chapel, half way between Hardtenberg and Mosbach."

"At midnight!" said Count Frederick, in a tone of much surprise.

"Ay, at midnight," answered the Count of Ehrenstein; "I cannot well be there before,

my good friend. I have another fugitive to seek and find."

Count Frederick's brow grew rather clouded, for he had doubts which he did not choose to express; but merely bowing his head in silent acquiescence, he left the hall with his followers; and ere another hour had passed, he and his train were riding down the hill, away from Ehrenstein.

CHAPTER VI.

IMBIBING somewhat of the spirit of the age whereof I write, I have, perhaps, in this true history, neglected to a certain degree the inferior persons of the tale, keeping myself among lords and ladies, counts and barons, to the exclusion from consideration of not less worthy and serviceable people; but the events at which I am now arrived, require me absolutely to descend from this high elevation, and to notice the fate of one whom, in a former part of the story, I have spoken of with some partiality.

It will not be difficult for the reader to recollect, that when Adelaide of Ehrenstein fled in terror towards the woodman's shed, she imagined that her maid Bertha was following

as fast as the four legs of her horse would carry her, and that soon after she discovered, to her consternation and surprise, that such was not the case. What became of Bertha in the mean time? In truth, the good gay girl had every inclination in the world to do as she was told; but, nevertheless, she did not follow her mistress ten steps; for, in the hurry and confusion of the moment, while endeavouring to extricate herself from the men and horses that were pressing to the front in order to favour the lady's escape, the long nun's gown, with which she was covered, caught in one of the large stirrup-irons of those days, and pulled her from her horse, as the beast hurried on in the direction which had been given to it.

She fell heavily, and was somewhat confused and stunned by the concussion, so that a moment or two went by without her being aware of anything that passed around. She felt herself raised from the earth, however, heard a number of voices speaking, saw various indistinct objects moving quickly about, and,

as sense began to return fully, beheld a party of armed men surrounding her companions of the way and herself, although the body which had quitted the abbey in the morning, seemed to be diminished by two or three.

The first words which she heard clearly, were pronounced in a loud but melodious tone, and were as follows:—"Pursue them quickly, and bring them back. Seek for the girl's horse also. We must know what all this means."

Looking up in the direction of the sounds, Bertha beheld a tall, powerful man on horseback, some five or ten yards before her, with fifteen or sixteen other gentlemen; some fully armed according to the custom of the day, but others in the garb of peace. Round about, and in the open space behind, were not less than two or three hundred soldiers, but the principal personage of the whole, he who had spoken, displayed no arms whatever, except the ordinary sword and dagger. He was

clothed in a loose coat of buff leather, trimmed with rich fur, and embroidered with gold thread in various quaint devices. Some careful and laborious needle had worked all over it the figures of birds, and flowers, and leaves, of syrens and armed men, and stags, and hounds, and mermaids; and on his head he wore a bonnet of crimson velvet, and a high plume of feathers, white as snow. His age might be between forty and fifty, but his beard and hair were black as jet, and his teeth white and fine. His countenance was pleasing, though there was something of a cold and sarcastic smile upon it, and the air with which he sat his horse was graceful but somewhat haughty. For a minute or two he said no more; but continued to gaze over the heads of those before him down the road into the wood, then turning his horse with a light hand, he exclaimed: "Wait, Rudolph, till they have brought those men back, then follow me, bringing them with you."

Leading the way onward at the head of the

troop, the person who had spoken pursued the same course which the party at the abbey had been taking. About fifty of his followers remained behind, guarding those who might now be considered prisoners; and though a deep silence succeeded to the great man's departure, Bertha, whose tongue was not under the most strict control, ventured at length to ask the man next her, "Who was that who has just ridden away?"

The person she addressed was one of her fellow-captives, and he answered in a low voice, "The Emperor, going to Spires, they say."

He immediately relapsed into silence, and Bertha's brain began to revolve the circumstances in which she was placed, and to inquire whether there was no chance of her being able to extract good out of evil, and to turn her captivity to some advantage. There were difficulties, however, which she saw not how to overcome: for, in the very first instance, she knew not what to do in regard

to her fair mistress. "If I leave her in the wood, poor simple thing," said Bertha to herself, "Heaven only knows what will become of her. She has not wit nor experience enough to get herself out of a difficulty, and, like a bird fresh from a cage, she will go fluttering about hither and thither till she is starved to death, or pecked to pieces by birds of prey. Then, again, if I tell these people where she is to be found, a thousand to one they will send her back at once to her father, and that will be worse than all. I wish to Heaven I could get a word with the man he called Rudolph, just to see what stuff he is made off."

A moment or two after, the sound of horses coming up the road was heard, and Bertha, looking round, perceived several of the Emperor's soldiers, bringing with them two of the men of the abbey, who had fled some minutes before. The leader of the party which had remained to guard the prisoners, saw the same objects, and pushed his horse a little forward, till he was nearly by the girl's side. Taking

advantage of the opportunity, which she thought might not occur again, Bertha drew nearer to him, saying: "My lord, I wish to speak with you."

The only answer she obtained, however, was,—"Hold your tongue, pretty mistress; I have nothing to do with this business. You must speak with the Emperor, if you have anything to say."

"But how can I speak with him, when he is not here?" cried the girl, impatiently.

"Oh, he will talk with you at Spires," replied the officer; "he never objects to see a pretty face, and I will tell him you want to speak to him—there, hold your tongue now, for I cannot attend to you."

In a few minutes after, the horse which Adelaide had ridden was brought forward, and Bertha lifted on it without question or ceremony. The men of the abbey were arranged in a line, a part of the Emperor's guard went before, and the rest followed; and at a quick pace, they pursued their way toward

Spires, consoling themselves as best they could.

Night came on, not long after, and under the influence of darkness and fatigue, Bertha's good spirits began to fail her sadly, and her light heart to sink. Nevertheless, hour by hour went by, and it was not till near midnight that the rising moon showed her some tall towers and steeples, which indicated they were approaching Spires. By this time, however, all power of talking had left her, and she could hardly sit her horse. The gates of that large and then splendid city were closed when the party reached them, and the few minutes that passed before they were opened, seemed to poor Bertha an hour. Then came the long and melancholy streets, lighted alone by an occasional moonbeam, or the torch or lantern carried before some knight or citizen on his way homeward from a late meeting. But at length a redder glare was seen at the end of the streets by which they passed, and the watch fire of a large party of soldiers showed the tall towers

and massive walls of the stupendous cathedral, with the cupola long since destroyed, standing out harsh and severe against the starry sky.

"I can go no farther," said Bertha, in a faint voice to one of the men who rode beside her; "I shall drop off my horse."

"'T is not far, 't is not far to the Retscher," answered the man, good humouredly; "bear up a little, poor maiden, till you reach the palace, and there you will be lodged comfortably, and well treated. I will speak with Count Rudolph, who has a kind heart, though a rough tongue."

Thus saying, he rode on; and in a few minutes after, the large massive building called the Retscher, which served as the Imperial palace when any of the Emperors visited Spires, appeared lighted by innumerable flambeaux, stuck in large stone stands before the steps. Though the hour was so late, all the courtly world seemed awake and busy; guards, attendants, pages were moving about; persons in rich dresses were seen coming in and going out of the various doors, and the weary head

of poor Bertha seemed to whirl in the midst of a gayer scene than she had ever witnessed before, as she was detained for a few minutes before the principal entrance, while the leader of the party, and one or two of his companions went in.

At length, however, Count Rudolph, as he was called, appeared again, and approaching the side of the tired girl's horse, lifted her off himself, and aided her up the steps, saying, "You must repose and refresh yourself to-night, fair lady; and the Emperor will see you early to-morrow."

Bertha could only reply by bowing her head; and, accompanying him into the palace, was led up several flights of steps, and through numerous passages, amidst servants and officers, till at length her conductor stopped before an elderly man, who had been sitting playing at tables with a page in one of the vestibules, but who instantly rose and bowed respectfully.

"Where is the room for the lady?" asked the Count, quickly.

"The page will show it, my lord," answered the old man; and given over to the guidance of a gay-looking good-humoured youth, Bertha was led on to a small but comfortable chamber at the end of the gallery. She saw that the young gentleman gazed at her, with a look of interest, from time to time; and fully conscious of her own good looks, the pretty maiden might not at any other time have failed to encourage his young gallantry, but she was too weary even for a light word; and when at length he lighted the lamp upon the table, and asked if he could do aught else to serve her, she only answered, "I am very faint."

"I will bring you some wine in an instant, beautiful lady," he said; and running away before she could decline, he soon returned with some wine and bread, and dried fruits.

He lingered as long as she would let him, pressed her to eat and drink, and seemed very willing to assist at her toilet also; but at length she contrived to send him away; and going back to his old companion, he declared with

all the wild enthusiasm and glowing imagination of youth, that she was the loveliest creature that had ever been created.

Bertha slept well, and slept long; nor was it till some one tried to open her door, which she had wisely locked, that she awoke on the following morning. The early visitor who thus roused her, proved to be a woman sent to give her assistance, but she was hardly dressed when one of the attendants came to summon her to the Emperor's presence. Bertha would fain have had more time to consider what she should say or do, but none was allowed her; and, trusting to woman's ready wit, she followed the man, who showed her a degree of deference and respect which somewhat surprised her. Descending two flights of steps, she was led to a door before which stood some armed men, and in a moment after was introduced into a small cabinet, where sat the same high person she had seen the day before, but with his head now uncovered, and a loose robe of rich fur cast negligently over his shoulders.

He rose as she entered, and when the attendant had retired, advanced a step, saying, "You wished to see me, lady.—But first tell me, is it true that I see the daughter of my noble acquaintance, the Count of Ehrenstein?"

Bertha's heart sank; for if the Emperor were indeed a friend of the Count of Ehrenstein, how would he judge, she asked herself, his daughter's escape from her father's roof?—and what would be his dealings with one who had aided and accompanied her in her flight? She had but a moment to ask herself the question, for the Emperor continued gazing on her, and then repeated the question almost sternly.

Bertha cast herself at his feet, and, giving way to awe and apprehension, burst into tears, sobbing forth, "No, mighty sir."

"Who are you then, pretty maiden?" asked the monarch, raising her, and forcing her to sit down. "These men who were with you have been telling my people a strange tale of doings somewhat rash and unruly in the castle of Ehrenstein. I understood from them that you

were the Count's daughter; and, although it were not quite politic in me, placed as I am, to countenance disobedience in a child towards a parent, yet, in favour of your bright eyes, I would certainly endeavour to mediate between you and the Count, should you be really his daughter, and, at all events, would protect you from hardship or violence; for I know that he is somewhat stern and severe, and has little indulgence even for beauty and gentleness."

His words gave new life to poor Bertha, who from time to time had given the monarch a furtive glance through the tears, from a pair of dark lustrous eyes, which might well win the admiration they seemed to have excited; and seeing both that she had gained some advantage, and that the Emperor was not in a mood, or of a character, to deal hardly with her fair mistress, even if she were in his power, she resolved to give him her own version of the story of Adelaide of Ehrenstein.

"I am not fit, sire," she replied, rising, "to sit in such a presence as this. Your officers

have made a mistake in thinking that I am the Lady Adelaide: I am but a very poor and humble companion of that lady, and my proper place is at your Majesty's feet."

She spoke gracefully and well; and, as she again knelt, the monarch felt somewhat like the page, and thought he had seldom seen a lovelier creature.

He would fain have raised her again, however, saying, "Nay, nay: I cannot bear you kneeling, pretty maid; and I must have a fair and free confession of all that has past."

"You shall have one as true as if this were a confessional, sire," replied Bertha, raising her eyes, with a ray of her old merriment brightening her look; "but ere I rise, I must be promised absolution full and entire."

Woman accommodates herself to new scenes and circumstances more quickly than man, and Bertha had already lost just sufficient of her awe to leave her wits free to act, without diminishing in the least her tone of respect. She had become familiarized with the presence of

the Emperor, without for a moment forgetting his station or her own; and there are few things more engaging to that curious being, man, than an air of confidence in his kindness and forbearance. I believe the natural heart of man would lead him, like other beasts, to pursue whatever flies—to crush whatever dreads him.

The Emperor was like the rest of his species, and he was pleased with the gay look that crossed the sad one, and with the confidence that brightened the awe. "Well, well," he said, "you shall have full pardon and absolution for all your pretty little sins, whatever they may be—but rise, maiden, rise."

"I would fain kneel still, sire," answered Bertha: "I feel that it is my right place in every way—as a humble subject in so high a presence, as a penitent, as a petitioner."

"Nay, then," cried the monarch, taking her by both hands, and raising her with gentle force, "I must make myself obeyed. Now tell me all truly, and I promise you that if I can aid or befriend you, I will."

Bertha did tell him all, sometimes in low tones of entreaty and deprecation; sometimes with a gay smile, subdued and chastened by a tear; sometimes an irrepressible jest at herself, at the world, at woman's nature and weakness, half coquettish, half sad, would break the even course of her tale; and while she went on, the monarch listened thoughtfully, and with interest in the tale itself, but more in the person who told it.

When she had done, he answered, "I must think over this; but for your sake, sweet one, it shall have kind consideration, and I will keep my promise by those bright eyes." As he spoke, he took both her hands in his, and kissed her cheek; meditated for a moment, and still holding her firmly. But then he suddenly released her, saying, "No," as if to himself.

At that moment there was a knock at the door of the cabinet, and the Emperor said, "Come in." An attendant instantly entered, and gave him a large sealed packet, saying,

"The messenger said it was of instant importance, sire, from the Count of ——."

"Well, well," cried the Emperor, waving his hand; and then, turning to Bertha, he added, "Now go back to your chamber, fair lady, where you shall be well taken care of. I will give *your* business full and kind thought, and will come and tell you the result."

"Good Heaven!" thought Bertha, as she quitted the cabinet, "What will become of me?"

But the Emperor's thoughts were salutary, and he forbore.

CHAPTER VII.

At first the sleep of Adelaide of Ehrenstein—when she at length could close her eyes after the strange music which she had heard—was troubled and light. Dreams visited her again and again; the same shapes reappeared in different garbs and circumstances; and a thousand shifting imaginations crossed tne darkness of the sleeping brain, and passed rapidly away, like summer lightning on a warm night. After some hours, however, more calm and refreshing slumber fell upon her, and, when she woke, the sun was shining brightly into her chamber, through the young green leaves of the vine that mantled the window. Everything looked

sweet and peaceful; the song of birds came musical to her ear, and she thought that from time to time she caught the sound of a distant chant and the swelling notes of the organ. The window was half open, and the balmy breath of spring fanned her cheek as she lay, while by her side sat the lady whom she had seen the night before, now gazing at her with the look of a tender mother watching a sick child. It was full of deep affection, yet melancholy, very melancholy; and who can gaze upon a young and inexperienced being just about to enter upon the thorny path of mature life—who, with a knowledge of all that experience teaches, the disappointments, the sorrows, the anxieties, the pangs, the agonies that await mortal man upon his strange career, can watch the young lie sleeping all unconscious of the evil to come, and not feel sad at heart to think that in such a bitter school they must learn the great lessons that prepare for immortality?

"Thou hast slept well, my child," said the lady, as soon as she saw that Adelaide was

awake. "I trust that thy weariness has passed away?"

"Yes, dear lady," answered Adelaide; "but not my fears. I heard horsemen pass by last night, and voices singing, and, had not my whole senses been dulled by fatigue, so that even very terror could not take hold upon them, I believe I should have lain here and watched the whole night through, thinking that every sound betokened pursuit."

"Have no fear, for there is no danger, dear one," said the lady. "I will show you, when you have risen, how easy escape would be, even if those whose pursuit you fear were aware of your place of refuge, and sought you here. We have a sure sanctuary close at hand. I will leave you now for a while, and then I will lead you to the chapel to praise God for your deliverance last night."

Adelaide rose, and dressed herself, though not very quickly; for her limbs still felt stiff and bruised; and often, too, she would pause and think, gazing from the window into the

little garden that surrounded the house, and feeling the peaceful influence of the scene, bring balm and refreshment to her heart. At length, when she was ready, she opened the door, and looked out where the neat woman servant was arranging all the little articles of furniture in the passage; and, while the maid ran to call her mistress, Adelaide could not prevent her thoughts from contrasting strongly the tranquil life of that humble cottage with the haughty state and troublous energy of her father's castle. Peace!—it is peace that the pure heart ever longs for; and every spot where fancy teaches us to believe it rests—the village, in its mantle of green trees—the cottage, with its humble thatch and curling smoke—the cloister, the very hermitage, wherever imagination places it, seems better far, however lowly, than the highest and most splendid scene without that good and holy tenant.

Her reverie lasted not long; for, coming down the narrow stairs, with the fair hand

resting on the dark old oak, the lady joined her guest in a few moments; and then, in a kind and tender tone, she said, "Come; it is fit that we should thank God for all things. Had we light to see, everything on earth is a blessing—except sin. There may be sorrow; but there is no evil but wickedness. Come, my child."

"I am ready, and quite willing," answered Adelaide, following; and the lady led her on along the passage to the back of the house, where appeared a low arch, and a heavy door covered with iron plates. It was not locked; but, as soon as it was drawn open, Adelaide beheld a ponderous key and manifold bolts and fastenings within, and another door beyond, while overhead, between the two, was a space open to the air, but above which hung the lower edge of an iron portcullis ready to descend. The lady saw her young companion's eyes turned up, and answered her thoughts by saying, "The touch even of so weak a hand as mine upon the machinery

behind this other door will cause that gate to descend in an instant, and cut off all communication between this cottage and the convent garden. Thus, you see we have a sure escape always nigh." As she spoke, she opened the other door, and Adelaide following her as she advanced, found herself in the garden of the convent of Heiligenstein. It was a calm and thoughtful-looking place, surrounded by high walls of massive masonry, which towered up almost to a level with the tops of the old trees. Of these there were many; beeches and oaks, and elms, with here and there a dark yew, contrasting strongly and solemnly with the light green foliage of the rest. They were, nevertheless, not planted thick together; but each tree stood detached, shadowing its own spot of ground; and beneath the branches no brushwood was suffered to grow, nor weeds to encumber the earth. The lower boughs, too, were cut away, to the height of six or seven feet up the stem, so that those who wandered in the garden in the summer could sit or stand

in the cool shade, and meditate at their leisure. The ground was generally covered with soft turf; but there were many paths of pebbles laid side by side, and here and there was a bed of such simple flowers as then ornamented the gardens of Europe. Except where some of the nuns were seen walking two and two, and speaking together in a low tone,—or where a solitary sister stood cultivating some one particular bed which she had taken under her especial care, all was still as death; and the only thing that seemed endued with life and energy was the little stream, which, entering from the hill above, flowed through the convent garden.

The nuns nodded kindly to the lady when she passed any of them, and gazed on Adelaide with inquiring eyes, turning the one to the other, and talking glibly. The outward world visited them too rarely for even an occasional glance of one of its denizens not to afford matter for busy speculation. The young lady of Ehrenstein and her conductor, however, went

on in silence, under the green old quiet trees, and over the soft cool turf, towards a pile of building with long curved windows, ornamented in a lighter style than the rest of the convent. Under a low, but wide-spreading tree, was a pointed door, apparently ever open, and through it the two passed into the chapel. It was lofty, if not spacious; and there was an air of misty gloom spread through it which disposed the heart to prayer, while through the stained glass windows of the chancel streamed a red and yellow light, as if from the glories of a world beyond this life. Advancing slowly to a chapel dedicated to "Our Lady of Good help," Adelaide's new friend bent her knees, and offered up the prayer of the heart. Adelaide knelt down also, and, though she spoke not aloud, her lips moved, and thanks and praise, and entreaty, rose up from before that altar to the Giver of all good, and the Protector from all evil. She felt more comfort and refreshment from that prayer than sleep or food had given; and, when she rose,

er thought was, "One can bear much, with ope and faith in God."

She was yet destined, and that speedily, to ed such support; but we must turn to what id been passing elsewhere, but not far off. hen the mistress of the little cottage beneath convent walls had left her dwelling with fair guest, all was quiet and peaceful; the eful maid was busily engaged in the small ance hall, brushing the dust from the rare furniture, raising, as she did so, a thin ud of motes, that went dancing away in a ng line of sunshine which streamed through he open door. The other servant was preparing breakfast for her lady, on her return. Nought stirred in the garden but the lizard on the wall, and the gay birds moving amongst the leaves of the vines. The two ladies could not have reached the chapel, however, when a head was raised over the garden wall at the corner farthest from the entrance. Had there been doubt or suspicion, no eye would have been turned in that direction; for there the moat

that enclosed the ground was broad and deep; and, whoever it was, who now gazed quickly round that quiet little spot, he must have found some means, by plank or ladder, of crossing the wide ditch. The maids in the house continued their work, unconscious; no one saw the intruder, no ear caught any sound of his proceedings; and, after having made his furtive examination of the premises, he raised himself upon his arms, swung himself over the wall, and, dropping down within the limits of the garden, hid himself behind the vines. A moment after, another head appeared; but the proceedings on this occasion were shorter than before. There was no long scrutiny of the ground; but, leaping over at once, this new visitor took up his position beside his companion. A third, a fourth, followed; and Heaven knows how many more might have thus poured in unperceived, had not a sudden ringing of the bell been heard at the garden-gate, which, as the reader is aware, lay on the other side of the house, towards the village.

So loud and sharp was the sound, that the maid who was in the passage ran out at once, and drew back the little wooden screen from the wicket. The face that presented itself was that of one of the peasants of the neighbouring village; and it was full of anxiety and apprehension.

"There are men getting over into the garden," he cried; "and a number more down beyond the corner of the wood. Run and tell the good lady."

The woman turned round, with a scream; for the first glance to the opposite side showed her three or four persons running from the far angle of the garden. Darting back into the house, she rushed along the passage, and through the doors which led to the convent. In her terror, she said not a word to her fellow-servant; but the moment she was within the convent-garden, she cast off the chain that upheld the portcullis, and it fell with a tremendous clang, cutting off the grounds of the nunnery from the cottage built against their walls.

In the mean time, three of the men had entered the dwelling where Adelaide had taken refuge the night before, and were searching it in no very ceremonious manner; while the fourth rushed to the garden gate, threw it open, and, running round to the angle, from which he could see the neighbouring wood, took off his steel cap, and waved it over his head as a signal to some persons at a distance. The moment after, a large party of horse drew out from amongst the trees, and rode up at a quick pace towards the cottage. A circumstance had occurred, however, which the leader of that party had wished to avoid; for the Count of Ehrenstein, though, as we have shown, a man of strong and violent passions, was more cautious, both by habit and by nature, than is usual with persons of his disposition. The peasant who had given the alarm to the good woman at the cottage instantly hurried to the great gates of the monastery, rang the bell, spoke a few words to the portress, and then ran away to the village.

In a minute or two after, the great bell of the convent rang loud and clear, sending the deep waves of sound far over forest and field, giving notice to a great distance round, that the nuns of Heiligenstein were in danger, and required aid. Ere it had rung for three minutes, the Abbess and several of the sisters appeared on the battlemented portal of the gate, and made signs to some of the horsemen who were now surrounding the cottage garden, expressive of a desire to speak with them. No notice was taken for some time; but at length, with a moody and disappointed brow, the Count of Ehrenstein himself came out from the cottage, with a number of men who had entered with him, and springing on his horse, rode up direct to the gates of the convent.

He seemed about to speak, but the Abbess, as well aware as any woman of the advantage of the first word in a dispute, exclaimed, before he could open his lips, "What seek you here, bold man; and how dare you enter, like a thief, the grounds and dependencies of this convent?"

"I seek for my own, my good lady and mother," replied the Count of Ehrenstein, "and will take it wherever I find it, by fair means, if peaceably yielded—by force, if withheld. You seem not to know me, though we have seen each other before; and what you have heard of me should make you understand that I am not one to be trifled with. You have my daughter within these walls; that fact I have learned beyond all doubt. Bring her out to me within five minutes, and all shall go well. I will take off my bonnet, like a good and humble servant of the Church, and thank you right courteously. But if you do not, my men with their axes will, in half an hour, hew down these gates of yours, and I will take boldly what I now ask reverently, though the night and a wolf or two may find their way in through the holes I am obliged to make."

"This is all pretence," answered the Abbess. "You seek to plunder the convent. I have never seen your daughter since she was an

infant; and you forge your cause of complaint, Count of Ehrenstein, in order to commit violence against a body of women whom you think helpless. But, thank God and our holy Mother, we are not without defence; and if you attempt to touch the gates, the consequences be upon your own head. Bid the men come up there, sister Louisa, and garnish the walls. I take Heaven to witness, that if blood be shed, it is this man's doing, for he seeks a vain pretence against me."

One of the nuns here whispered a few words to the Abbess, and the Abbess replied with an impatient gesture; but in the mean time, at a signal from above, a number of men, armed in haste, with cross bows in their hands, began to hurry up, their heads and shoulders appearing at various parts of the wall, and over the battlements of the portal. At the same time, the great bell, which had ceased while the Abbess and the Count were speaking, commenced again its loud peal, and a crowd of people were seen hurrying down from the hills

beyond, while several parties appeared running with whatever arms they could collect, from the farther end of the village to a postern behind the convent. Every thing, in short, seemed to promise, that there would speedily take place one of the scenes so common in those days, when nunnery or abbey was attacked by any of its unruly neighbours, and defended successfully or unsuccessfully, not alone by the vassals, who were bound by their tenure to serve in arms, but also by the peasantry, who had generally many motives for gratitude and kindly feeling towards the ecclesiastics and recluses who dwelt among them.

The enterprise, however, seemed now somewhat more serious in the eyes of the Count of Ehrenstein than he had previously expected. The words of the Abbess were bold and resolute; her declaration that she had not seen his daughter since she was an infant, had been spoken in a frank and straightforward tone; the number of men who already crowded the walls was considerable, and more were likely

soon to arrive. Besides this, the reputation of attacking a nunnery was not altogether that which the Count of Ehrenstein could have desired; and he felt that he could be by no means certain of what acts his soldiers might commit, to bring down discredit on his name, even if he should be successful.

These considerations made him hesitate; and spurring his horse somewhat nearer to the gate, he said, "Lady Abbess, it is quite possible my disobedient child may be here without your knowledge or consent. I wish to do nothing rashly, wrongly, or unjustly; and to show you that I am not using a false pretence to violate your rights, although I have certain information that she is now here, I will give you half an hour to seek for her, and bring her forth, provided you stop the ringing of that bell. If you do not bring her forth within that time, I must use my own right, and take her."

The Abbess made no reply, but waved her hand, with an angry and somewhat scornful

expression; and, accompanied by the nuns, withdrew from the walls, leaving them guarded by the armed men who had been admitted.

The first care of the Count of Ehrenstein was to prevent the entrance of any more; and he accordingly detached a small party to guard the postern at the back of the convent. He then held a conversation with Sickendorf and old Carl von Mosbach, and, although the bell still continued to ring, he delayed the threatened attack, withdrawing his men out of the reach of the cross-bows, and watching, with somewhat anxious eyes, the progress of the peasantry who were coming down the hills, and who, when they saw the postern guarded by his horsemen, gathered in one body of considerable strength upon the nearest slope. When about twenty minutes had elapsed, some movements towards the attack might be observed amongst his soldiery; several small trees were cut down, and shaped into various implements with the axe. Twelve stout men dismounted, and were formed in

two lines before the rest; and, judging by these signs, that more active operations were about to commence, the cross-bowmen on the walls might be seen fitting their quarrels to the string; and some of them seemed marking out the principal figures amongst the assailants for the first shot.

Before they proceeded further, however, the Count once more rode forward to the gate, whispering a word before he went to old Carl Von Mosbach, who immediately led five or six men round to the cottage garden, and disappeared amongst the vines.

The Count, as soon as he was within hearing, called to a burly yeoman, who seemed in command above the gate, and bade him send for the Abbess, as he wanted to speak with her again. A few minutes elapsed before she appeared; but as soon as she came forward, the Count addressed her, saying, "You have now, Lady Abbess, had full time to inquire and learn whether my child be within your gates or not. You know well that she is.

I see it on your face; and I, as her father, summon you to bring her forth, and yield her to my lawful authority. If not, the evil consequences, whatever they may be, rest upon your head, not mine; for you dare not and cannot deny that she is at this moment in the convent."

The countenance of the Abbess—it was a venerable and amiable one, though somewhat touched with pride—was certainly troubled; but still she replied boldly, and at once, "Your daughter, my lord the Count, is at the altar of Our Lady of good help, and that is *sanctuary*. I knew not, when I spoke to you before, that she was within these walls; but even had I known it, I must have refused to give her up. I no more dare to take her from sanctuary than you do; and therefore I tell you to withdraw your men from these gates,—to return home to your own dwelling, and to leave this holy place in peace."

"Away with such idle words!" cried the Count, furiously; "what sanctuary shall shield

a child from her father, whom she has offended? Will you bring her forth at once, or I will fire your convent and your sanctuary together? Advance, Sickendorf!"

"Take but one step towards these gates, and the deepest curses of the church shall fall upon you all," cried the Abbess. "What, shall not the sanctuary, which gives safety even to the homicide, with his fellow's blood red upon his hand, shield an innocent child from the fury of her rash and violent father? Bend your bows, my children, and defend these holy walls to the last, if they be attacked."

"On, Sickendorf, on!" cried the Count, waving his hand; but the old knight rode forward alone, while a quarrel from one of the cross-bows, discharged by somewhat too eager a hand, rang upon his casque.

"There is a trumpet, my lord the Count," said the good old soldier, paying no more attention to the missile than if it had been a snow-ball thrown by a boy in sport; "better see who is coming, before we begin: if they

be friends, they will help us; if enemies, it were well not to let them take us in the flank."

The Count looked round, with a gloomy brow, and a fierce rolling eye, in the direction towards which Sickendorf had pointed. No one was yet visible; but the woods and hills screened the roads round about till they came very near the village; and the sounds of a trumpet was heard again, clear and distinct, mingling shrilly with the low dull peal of the great bell of the convent.

"Help is at hand!" cried the Abbess. "Bold man, you will repent this:" and, almost as she spoke, two figures appeared at the opening of the road that led away towards Spires. One was a gentleman of the middle age, unarmed, but mounted on a powerful charger. The other was a monk, if one might judge by his garments, riding a mule well nigh as spirited as a horse.

"Father George, I think," cried Sickendorf; "but who is that with him? There are more behind."

The next instant the head of a troop of horse was seen, with several officers in arms, a herald, two trumpeters, and a banner; and, as two and two the men-at-arms issued forth, at a quick pace, the Count of Ehrenstein soon perceived that his own force was far inferior.

"Gather the men together, Sickendorf," he cried; "call Mosbach and his men out of the cottage; bring the party back from the postern there, and secure that road by the left of the village. We must retreat. Who, in the fiend's name, can these be?"

"It is an imperial banner, sir," answered the old knight, ere he rode back to the troop to execute the orders he received.

In the mean while the other party advanced rapidly: they crossed the little stream, were lost for a minute behind an orchard,—their heads and shoulders, banners and lances, were then seen over the walls of the cottage-garden; and in another moment the officer in command halted his men within fifty yards of the convent gate. After a few words to those behind,

he pushed his horse forward, accompanied by Father George, and followed by the herald and one of the trumpeters. "What is all this?" he cried, in a loud, stern tone: "why is the alarm bell of this holy place ringing so loud? and what are these armed men doing before the walls of Heiligenstein?"

"The Count of Ehrenstein comes to force a penitent from the sanctuary of our Lady's altar," cried the Abbess, waving her hand for the bell to cease; "and he was about to force our gates and burn the convent. Thank God! and all the saints, for your coming, noble Count."

"I am here, Count Rudolph of Schönborn," said the Count of Ehrenstein, riding a little forward, and smoothing his brow, "to claim my disobedient daughter at the hands of these good sisters, who do not deny that she is within their walls; and it was certainly my determination to take her hence, with as little force as might be, upon their refusal to give her up upon the pretence of sanctuary. I

trust that you, as a father yourself, and a brother noble, will aid me to make this reverend lady hear reason,—for who ever knew of sanctuary protecting a refractory child from her parent's due authority?"

"I know no limit to the shelter of a sanctuary, my good lord," replied Count Rudolph. "Even I, myself, though now armed with the Emperor's authority, must respect it, as you will soon see. As to forcing the gates of a holy place like this, and threatening to burn it down, even as a menace, it is a high offence, my lord."

"A usual one with this noble Count," said Father George, "as I showed the Emperor this morning."

"Ha, poisonous reptile!" cried the Count of Ehrenstein, giving way to a burst of fury; "have you been spitting your venom so far from your own den? Who made my child—the sweetest, gentlest girl that ever lived—despise her father's authority, fly from her home, and wed a beggarly outcast? Who

prompted his brother's bastard to seduce from her duty the daughter of his lord? But there is vengeance yet in store."

"My lord the Count," replied Father George, calmly, "I might put questions to you more difficult to answer than these will prove to me. When you ask them in fit presence, as I believe you will soon have occasion, I am ready to reply; but the matter is now in other hands, and there I will leave it for the time."

"I will leave my cause with you in no other hands," answered the Count of Ehrenstein, fiercely; "sooner or later I will have vengeance. It were vain now, I see," he continued, turning to Count Rudolph, "to try to enforce my right here to the custody of my own child, as you, sir, refuse to give me aid; and therefore ——"

"Stay yet a moment, my lord of Ehrenstein," said Count Rudolph; "my whole mission refers to you: and, first, as to your daughter, you had better witness what steps I take. My dear lady Abbess," he continued,

advancing close to the gates, "I was commanded by the Emperor, my lord and friend, to seek the lady Adelaide, of Ehrenstein, here, and to bring her to the Imperial Court at Spires, there to live, under my good wife's protection, till her case can be fully considered. As, however, she has claimed sanctuary, far be it from me even to think of taking her from it without her free consent. Give her, therefore, my message, and tell her, that if she be willing to go with me, I pledge my knightly word, at any time that she may require it, to restore her to her place of refuge, and defend her there against all men."

"I will tell her, my lord," replied the Abbess, "and doubtless she will readily go with one so noble and so true."

"I will not stay here," cried the Count of Ehrenstein, "to be mocked and set at nought by my rebellious child.—Mount the men, Mosbach, and march."

"One moment more, my lord," said Count Rudolph; "I was bound for Ehrenstein, had

I not so fortunately found you here; so that I am saved a farther journey. You are accused, my lord, before the Imperial Chamber, of several high offences, and ——"

"And you are ordered, perhaps, to arrest me," said the Count, reining back his horse towards his troop: "be it at your own peril,— I am not very tame."

"You mistake, sir," said Count Rudolph; "I am ordered formally to summon you to appear to-morrow before the Emperor's court at Spires; there to answer any charges that may be brought against you. Advance, herald, and read the summons."

The herald immediately spurred forward his horse, till he was somewhat in advance of Count Rudolph and Father George, and then, drawing forth a parchment with a large seal, he read aloud, in a dull and monotonous voice, a formal summons for the Count of Ehrenstein to appear, as Count Rudolph had announced. After he had concluded, he waved his truncheon thrice in the air, and each

time the trumpeter behind blew a loud short blast.

"And now, my good lord, I may as well ask whether you will appear or not?" said Count Rudolph, as soon as this ceremony was over.

"I love to have time to consider all things," answered the Count of Ehrenstein. "To-morrow will be time enough for my determination to appear: and now, my lord, farewell. I trust your daughter may prove as obedient as mine, and may find friends, as wise and powerful as yourself, to aid and encourage her in the course she chooses."

Thus saying, with a bitter smile, and every angry passion in his heart, the Count of Ehrenstein turned his horse and rode away, his retainers following, and old Sickendorf keeping a wary eye to the rear, lest any attack should be made upon their retreating party, either by the force of Count Rudolph, or the armed peasantry who had gathered on the hill.

CHAPTER VIII.

It is a common maxim that time destroys falsehood, and leaves truth intact. This may be true in the abstract; for truth, in its nature is indestructible; but as the mind of man is always more or less in a misty state, and his perception of no object very clear and distinct; even that which is true in the abstract he often renders false in application by various errors of his own, and by none more frequently than by using that in a figurative sense which is only just in a definite sense. No maxim has thus been more perverted than the one I have cited, that time destroys falsehood, but leaves truth intact. It has been used figuratively; it has had its signification

extended; it has had its very terms altered; and we find it at last changed so as to assert that time destroys falsehood, but brings truth to light. In this form, however, it is altogether inadmissible. Time may destroy falsehood, as anything else that is perishable. It may sometimes bring truth to light; but it does neither always; and this is one of the vulgar maxims of the world, of which we have so many, intended to support morality, but, in fact, destroying it; for the key-stone of morals is truth. Society manufactures facts just as it builds houses and churches, forms rings, or swords, or bracelets. The real deeds, and thoughts, and feelings of men, and the false assertions concerning them —all, in short, that forms the great mass of history, — are cast down, broken, mutilated, and covered over with the mud and ashes of passing generations, as age follows age; but the truth lies buried as well as the falsehood; and the waves of time that overlay them with the refuse, and lumber, and dirt of a hundred centuries, from hour to hour, roll up the frag-

ments to the feet of those who stand upon the dry strand of the present; or else man's busy and inquisitive hand digs them up; and—as we search amongst the ruins of a past city, for the gems and jewels, the sculpture and the painting of races now no more, casting from us what is worthless—so seek we amongst the records of the former times (if we are wise), preserving what is true and precious, and throwing away what is false. Yet how much useless lumber and unsubstantial trash is retained and valued in both cases. What history is not full of lies!—what cabinet uncrowded with fabrications!

Perhaps in no case whatever has time given us so little truth as in regard to many points relating to the religious institutions of the middle ages. The gross and horrible superstitions and corruptions of the Romish church, and the ambitious motives and eager thirst for domination that existed in her hierarchy, acted as a sort of deluge, overwhelming and hiding many excellent results—much that was fine—much that

was holy—much that was pure. The subject is vast, and is receiving more attention now than it ever has done since the Reformation; but I have to do with only one point. The monasteries and nunneries of those days have been represented, generally, as places of mere idleness, or idleness and vice; and yet, at the periods when they were established, and for centuries after, they operated in many respects most beneficially. They were the countercheck to feudal power and tyranny; a refuge to the people in the time of oppression; a sure support in the hour of need. There were drawbacks, certainly; they were the manufactories of superstitions, the citadels of the enemy in a fierce war against the human mind. Still they did much good, in some directions, in their day. The lives of the recluses have been severely criticised; they have, upon the faith of some shocking instances, been represented as full of wickedness and corruption; and yet in general the people loved them. There cannot be a doubt of it,—especially the people of

the country; for the new risen communes were generally inimical to them.

At all events, the peasantry round the convent of Heiligenstein were devotedly attached to the good sisters, who, living amongst them, witnessed their joys and sorrows, alleviated their sufferings, wherever it was possible, and sympathised with them whenever they had no other balm to give. Simple in their lives, kind in their dealings, liberal of their wealth, for which they had no other employment but charity, and spreading those human affections which were denied an individual object over the whole race, the nuns were pardoned easily a little spiritual pride, as the alloy of the finer qualities which they constantly displayed. The armed peasants, who had hurried to their rescue, would willingly have shed their blood in defence of their friends and benefactors; and a menacing movement took place amongst them as the soldiery of the Count of Ehrenstein withdrew. A message, sent in haste by the Abbess, stopped any hostile proceeding; but a

loud shout of derision, harder to bear, perhaps, than actual assault, followed the Count, and worked up his anger almost to madness.

Count Rudolph of Schönborn, turned a quick and somewhat angry glance towards them, for although a kind and noble hearted man, he was not by any means without the prejudices of his class; and he felt the indignity offered to another noble as an insult to his whole order. He might, indeed, have added sharp words to his fierce look, but the voice of the Abbess, speaking from above, caught his ear, and he advanced, inquiring, "What says the Lady Adelaide?"

"I have not given her your message yet, my good lord," was the reply; "I stayed to see what would happen to that bad Count of Ehrenstein. But I have ordered the gates to be thrown open for you, my noble lord, and refreshment to be prepared for your men, in the village. You had better see the lady yourself, poor thing. Doubtless, her father's harsh, bad temper has driven her to fly from him. He

killed her mother, who was as sweet a girl as ever lived, and my dear friend, in childhood."

"Killed her!" exclaimed Count Rudolph in surprise.

"Nay, she means but by unkindness, my lord Count," replied Father George. "There are murders which no law but that of God will reach; but I cannot but think, that to slay the innocent and good by daily torture, cold looks, harsh words, and deeds bitterer than blows, is as great or greater a crime than to end life quickly by the dagger or the phial. But see, my lord, the gates are open. Will you not enter? I shall beg leave to accompany you within, for my words may have more power with the lady than those of a stranger, however noble."

"We must not be long," answered Count Rudolph; and advancing to the gates, he entered the outer court of the convent where the Abbess stood ready to receive him, with all marks of gratitude and respect. She did not, indeed, lead him to the interior of the building,

but took her way to the parlour of the lodge, where she ordered refreshments to be brought instantly, and then, at the request of the Count, sent for poor Adelaide of Ehrenstein. Father George she seemed to know well, and though they were too courteous to converse apart in Count Rudolph's presence, their looks held a mute conversation, till, at length, the door of the parlour again opened, and Adelaide appeared, clinging with unsubdued terror to the lady with whom she had found refuge, whose face also was grave and apprehensive. The sight of Father George, however, seemed to revive and encourage them both. Adelaide at once sprang towards him and kissed his hand, and the lady greeted him with a bright and well satisfied smile. To the one, his manner was kind and paternal; to the other, reverent and courteous; but Adelaide, ere she even looked round to Count Rudolph, whispered, "Ferdinand, Father?—Ferdinand? I have not seen him."

"He is safe, my child," said the old monk, in

a low tone; "fear not; the crisis is coming; and you will now find that the promises I made are fulfilled. You have still to play your part, my child; but look upon it as a blessing from Heaven, that you have the opportunity of playing that part, and I trust of saving those most dear to you."

"Have you told the lady?" asked Count Rudolph, interrupting the monk, as he was going on.

"No, my good lord," answered Father George, "I have not ventured to give your message in your own presence."

Count Rudolph advanced towards Adelaide, and with a graceful, though somewhat stately air, he said, "Your case, lady, has come before my lord the Emperor in two forms: first, by private information from a source in which he seems to have some confidence; and next, by an open statement, made this morning, a few minutes before I set out—and of which, by the way, I know nothing—by my reverend and very good friend here, Father George. His

l Majesty seems to have been greatly
by the account given to him, and he
ied me in haste to request your pre-
t his court at Spires. To satisfy any
that you might have, he required
assure you of the protection and mo-
care of my good wife, the Countess
nborn, which she will give you, I may say,
ngly and frankly, as if you were a child of
own. The Emperor knew not, when he
me, that you had taken sanctuary, and
s he spoke in the tone of command; but being
ll aware that no one has greater reverence for
e church than he, I dare use nothing but
itreaty now, assuring you, upon my knightly
vord and honour, that at your request, I will
restore you to this place of refuge, and there
defend you to the best of my power, should it
be needful."

Adelaide paused, and m reply for a moment, looking to Fa e, as if for counsel. "Go, my c aid. "Great things are on the n in the Em-

peror's court. It is needful that you should be present; for it often happens that a woman's voice, wisely employed, mitigates the severity of man's justice, and acts the sweetest part of heaven on earth; go, my child, go. With this good lord's inviolable word to guard you, you are as safe at Spires as here."

Adelaide gently clasped her hands together, and looked down upon the ground for a moment or two, lost in deep thought. It was not that she hesitated, it was not that she asked herself, "Shall I, or shall I not, quit this place of sure and peaceful refuge, to mingle again with the strifes and confusion of the world?" for her mind was made up; and, thus far advanced, she was ready to go on. But it was that she saw many a painful hour before her, and she asked herself, "How shall I surmount all the anguish and the difficulty of the hour? Will my courage fail, will my bodily strength give way? Will God help me at my need, and strengthen me to do his appointed task?" As she thus thought, her hands pressed closer

together, and her lips murmured, "Christ help me!" Then turning to Count Rudolph, she said, "I am ready to go, my lord, in obedience to the Emperor's command, and trusting to your word."

She did not venture to say more, and Count Rudolph showed some inclination to depart; but the Abbess besought him to pause awhile, till both he and the lady had partaken of some refreshment. To speak the truth, he was not averse to a supply of good meat and wine; for he had ridden far, and was at all times blessed with a good appetite. He made Adelaide his excuse, however; and while he courteously complimented her in somewhat formal speeches, according to the custom of the day, Father George spoke eagerly, but apart, to the lady who had been Adelaide's hostess, and then called the Abbess to their consultation. Like a hill-side under cloud and sunshine, the cheek of the lady glowed and turned pale by turns, as she listened to the words which the monk spoke. She gazed down upon the ground, she looked

up to the sky, her eyes filled with tears, her limbs trembled; and ere she answered, she sat down upon a settle, as if overpowered by what was said.

"This is foolish and weak," she exclaimed, at length. "I will not shrink from the task, and why should I dread the peril? For him have I lived, for his sake have I endured the burden of existence, which otherwise would have long since crushed me. 'T is but the habit of concealment and apprehension that engenders these foolish fears; and I will shake them off. Father, you tell me it is right to go, and I will go, if death should be my portion."

"Joy may be your portion, daughter," answered Father George, laying his right hand lightly, but impressively, upon her shoulder;—"joy, brighter, deeper, than you have known for years, perhaps than you have known in life —It may be so. I say not that it will; but surely, to see your son raised to the summit of your highest hopes, is sufficient motive even for a greater risk."

"It is—it is," answered the lady; "and I will go, good Father; but do not abandon me, do not leave me to meet a strange court, and scenes such as I have not seen for years, alone. I shall feel like some of the wild creatures of the woods, suddenly caught, and brought before a thousand gazing eyes."

"I will go with you, daughter," answered Father George, "for your sake, and for that dear child's; I will not leave you as long as there is aught doubtful in your fate. If wrong has been committed, it is mine; and I will abide the issue with you."

While this conversation had taken place between Father George and the lady, with the Abbess listening, and joining in from time to time, Count Rudolph had applied himself to soothe and encourage Adelaide, and he had made some progress in quieting her apprehension, when the refreshments which had been ordered were brought in. The worthy Count undoubtedly did more justice to the good fare than any of the other persons present; but the

despatched his present task rapidly; and then, after pausing for a moment to see if his companions would take anything more, he rose, as a signal for departure.

Several little interludes had taken place, and all the by-play which must occur in such a scene. Lay-sisters had come in and gone out; two men had even appeared in the parlour, had received orders, and taken their departure; but the Count had paid little attention, and was somewhat surprised in the end to find that he was to have another companion besides the Lady Adelaide. He was too courteous to offer any objection, however; and in a short time the whole party were on their way to Spires.

We need not notice the incidents of the journey, which were few and of no importance. Refreshed by a night's rest, Adelaide was far less fatigued than Bertha had been the night before; but still, as they entered the city, then in its splendour and its pride, filled with a moving multitude, and displaying in its streets all the pageantry of commerce, of arms, and of

royalty, with gay cavalcades at every corner, with marching troops, with sounding trumpets, with gaily decorated booths and shops, and with innumerable human beings, all occupied with themselves, or with thoughts totally alien to her feelings, situation, and anticipations, Adelaide felt lost and abandoned in the crowd, and her heart sank with a greater feeling of desolation than ever she had felt in the wildest scenes of her own hills.

Such sensations were increased when they approached the palace, and beheld a multitude of guards and attendants, armed and on horseback, surrounding a small open space, in the midst of which was seen a magnificent charger, held by two grooms; while, with one knee bent to the ground, a man of lordly aspect, held a gilded stirrup, to which another, of the middle age, robed in royal splendour, placed his foot, and then vaulted into the saddle.

Count Rudolph reined in his horse, and the whole party halted, while the Emperor putting himself at the head of his train, rode

past, merely noticing his friend and companion by an inclination of the head. As soon as the Imperial troop had marched by, Lady Adelaide was conducted to the palace, and led, by nearly the same course which Bertha had followed the night before, to two rooms which had been prepared for her. Father George followed, but paused at the door, saying, "I must seek myself lodging in the priory; but before I go, dear lady, let me tell you, I find, from the words of the Emperor this morning, that your maid Bertha is here. I learned late last night, that your party had been intercepted by one of the three men who fled; and I set off two hours before daybreak, to inquire into the fate of all. You will need your maid to attend upon you, and I will ask one of the pages to send her. Moreover," he added, in a low voice, "it is needful to know what she has said to the Emperor; not that I wish you to have any concealment from him; for he may know all; indeed, he does know all, as far as I can tell it; and it will be well for you

to show him the motives on which you have acted, and to plead at once for that lenity, of which some who have offended may have great need. Now, for the present, farewell, my child, and farewell too, dear lady; I shall see you both again ere night."

Thus saying, Father George left his fair companions, and in a moment or two after, Bertha ran into the room, and threw her arms round her fair mistress, kissing her tenderly, but gazing upon the stranger who was with her in some surprise.

"Oh! dearest lady," she cried, in her usual gay tone, "I have been in sad terror about you, and about myself too, ever since we parted. I knew you were little fit to take care of yourself where you were; and I soon found I was little fit to take care of myself where I was; for Bertha in a court was quite as much lost as Adelaide in a wood; but Heaven took care of us both it seems. Yet I must hear all that has happened to you; for by no stretch of imagination can I conceive how one so little

experienced in the tangled ways of life, could get out of that forest in the night time—unless indeed, Father George came to your help; for that wild boy of a page tells me, a monk sent him to call me to you—pray, let me hear all."

"You will hear in good time, maiden," said the elder lady, somewhat gravely; "but at present, it is needful that you should tell your mistress all that has taken place between yourself and the Emperor; for we know not when he may return and call for her; and it is right that she should hear what has been said."

"Oh, I will tell what I said to him, in a minute," answered Bertha, laughing; "but I must not tell all he said to me, for that would be betraying Majesty's confidence—though it would serve him right too; for great men in furs and velvets should not try to make fools of poor girls."

"I seek not, my good Bertha," replied Adelaide, "to hear aught that he said to you. That does not concern me; but Father

George seems to think that you told him much respecting me, and —"

"I told him all I knew, dear lady, and all I guessed," answered Bertha; "but it was not till he had promised me, upon his royal word, pardon for myself, and help for you, in case of need. But to my story, such as it is—first, I told him that you were lost in the wood, which I described as well as I could; and, moreover, that if you were out of it, you would be as much puzzled to find your way either through the mazes of the country or the mazes of your fate, as if you remained in. Then he asked me a great number of questions, to which I could only answer by guess—such as Whether you were really married to Ferdinand of Altenburg? and I told him, I felt very sure of it, though I did not see the ring put on with my own eyes."

Adelaide's cheek grew somewhat crimson, but the lady who was with her asked, "Well, what more?"

"Why then, madam, he inquired," continued

Bertha, "Who Ferdinand of Altenburg really was? and I told him that I fancied he was of higher rank than he seemed, and of better hopes and fortunes too."

"I think you must have omitted something, dear Bertha," said Adelaide; "for how came he to ask if I were married to Ferdinand of Altenburg, if you told him nothing of poor Ferdinand before?"

"That puzzled me as much as it does you, lady," replied Bertha; "but there were a thousand things besides that, which made me feel sure that he had got nearly as good information as I could give, from some one else. I went to him in the nun's gown, and he took me for you at first; but when he found out the mistake, he questioned me closely, I can assure you. Amongst other things, I told him that it was high time for both you and Ferdinand to run away, inasmuch as I believed, if you had staid, my good and merciful lord, your father, would have chopped both your heads off. Then he asked if you were very handsome, and I said

Not particularly; for it seemed to me that this mighty Kaiser had a great faculty of falling in love, and that if I told him how beautiful you really are, you might find it unpleasant."

"Hush! hush! Bertha," said Adelaide; "there is no fear of the Emperor falling in love with either of us. You must not mistake mere courtly words for lover's professions."

"Well, I wish I were safe out of the place," answered Bertha; "for, on my life! these courtly words are very warm ones; and as summer is hard by, the air is hot enough without them. But to my tale again—I told him, in short, that I thought you were married; that I knew you had long loved; that I believed you knew who Ferdinand of Altenburg really is, as well or better than he does himself, and that I was quite sure you acted for the best in giving him your hand without your father's knowledge. On that he questioned me a long while, as to whether love would not make a woman do anything, and whether you had not listened to love instead of duty. I said No; that love

would do great things, but not all, and that, whatever his Majesty might think, there were some women who would not do what they knew to be wrong, even for love."

"You said well, Bertha;—you said well," answered Adelaide, casting down her eyes thoughtfully, and questioning her own heart as to how far love had made her lend a willing ear to persuasions that took the voice of duty. But the elder lady bent her head approvingly towards the maid, and gave her a well pleased smile.

Bertha's tale was soon concluded, and for a while both the ladies mused over her account. The elder seemed not dissatisfied with what she stated had taken place, but there were parts of the maid's narrative which created some uneasy feeling in Adelaide's breast.—She had previously shrunk from meeting a monarch to whom she might be obliged to speak of feelings and actions which she would fain have left in silence for ever, although the feelings might be pure and noble, and the

actions just and right; but she gathered from Bertha's words that there had been a lightness of tone in the Emperor's conversation which might well increase her apprehensions and make the timid modesty of her nature almost deviate into terror. Her cheek turned pale as she thus thought, and the watchful eye of her elder companion saw the change.

"You are somewhat faint and weary, my dear child," she said; "I wonder that the Countess of Schönborn has not yet appeared. She would doubtless procure you some refreshment."

"I can do that as well, madam," answered Bertha, turning gaily to the door. "In the Emperor's absence, I command the buttery, and the cellar, and am humbly served, I can tell you.—Here, slave," she continued, opening the door and speaking to some one in the passage; "bring these ladies some food and wine; and be quick, if you would merit favour."

Adelaide smiled, inquiring, "Who have you there, giddy girl?"

"Oh, one who has vowed humble service this

morning," answered Bertha; "and as I hope and trust his bondage will not be long, I may as well use my reign imperiously."

In a few minutes, the page whom we have seen before came in with an inferior servant bearing refreshments; but ere Adelaide and her companions had tasted much, Count Rudolph of Schönborn and his Countess were announced, and ushered in with more of the pomp and state of high station than had yet been seen in the Retscher. To the surprise of both Adelaide and her companion, it was to the latter that the Countess of Schönborn first addressed herself, and that with an air of deep deference and respect.

"Although it was to this young lady—whom I take to be the Lady Adelaide of Ehrenstein," the Countess said,—"that my husband promised my protection and support, yet, madam, as my good friend, Father George of Altenburg, has made me acquainted with much concerning you, let me first offer you any courtesy or attention I can show."

"I may doubtless yet much need your favour, madam," replied the lady; "and will seek it frankly, with many thanks that it is frankly offered; but, for the time, this dear child requires countenance and help, such as I ought to have power myself to give her, were it not for the wrong I suffer."

The Countess's next address was to Adelaide; but it gave the poor girl but small comfort or support; for though she wished to be kind and considerate, Count Rudolph's worthy dame knew not rightly how. Stately and ceremonious, she was not fitted to console under misfortune, or inspire confidence in difficulty. She was one of those people who are ever ready to do a real service or confer an important favour, but who make even bounty burdensome by the manner in which it is exercised. Oh, how poor and unequal is the exchange thus sought, of deference for regard! Strange, strange must be the constitution of those minds who prefer reverence to affection. Words of course, formal courtesies, were all that passed between the

Lady Adelaide and her visitor, and although Heaven knows the poor girl had little pride in her nature, and her heart was as gentle as the summer air, yet such was the influence of the Countess's manner upon her that she became cold and almost haughty in demeanour. Perhaps it might do her good, however; for deeply depressed as she was, ignorant of the fate of those she loved best, anxious and apprehensive in regard to the event of each coming hour, she required something to rouse her from her despondency, and recall her thoughts from the dreary looking forward to the future.

The Countess of Schönborn staid long, and only retired when the sound of trumpets announced the Emperor's return; but, strange as it may seem, though her demeanour had certainly not much pleased Adelaide, yet Adelaide had much pleased her. Her cold stateliness had generated the same; she herself had been reflected from Adelaide's mind as from a glass; and as she valued herself highly, she was well satisfied with the image.

"She is a dignified and high-minded young woman," said the Countess to her husband, as they went away; "and I am quite sure that, whatever men may say, she would never do aught unworthy of her rank and station."

Count Rudolph knew more of human nature than his wife; he understood the process by which the fair girl had become so different a creature in the Emperor's palace from what she had been at the convent and by the way; and he smiled, but without reply.

When they were gone, Adelaide's heart sank again; she expected each minute to be called to the presence of the monarch, and all her fears and apprehensions returned. Bertha, who knew her well, easily divined what was passing in her heart, and strove to console and cheer her, saying, "Indeed, dear lady, you, who fear no ghosts, need not fear any emperors. They are a much tamer sort of cattle than we have any notion of till we come near them—somewhat frolicsome, indeed, but no way frightful."

"Alas! my poor Bertha," answered the lady, "we have all our own particular objects of fear; and that which might reassure you, would terrify me. I am in no sportive humour myself, and I could easier bear a reproof just now than a jest."

Still no summons came: hour after hour passed by, and Adelaide began to think she was forgotten. A short visit from Father George tended in some degree to break the heavy tedium of expectation; but he remained not more than ten minutes, and during that time he was engrossed in eager and private conversation with the lady of the cottage. He was evidently hurried, and Adelaide thought she saw more agitation in his manner than she had ever before witnessed. Her fears increased; she asked herself if aught had gone wrong; if his plans, like so many other well-devised schemes, had failed; but the calm demeanour of her fair companion when he was gone, reassured her in a degree; and at length just as the light that streamed through the long

windows was growing somewhat fainter, the expected summons came, and she rose to obey it.

"I would fain go with you, my dear child," said the elder lady, in her low, musical voice; "but I fear I must not on this occasion."

"I know it—I know it," answered Adelaide; "but, strange to say, I fear less now than I did a moment ago. Expectation is fear."

Thus saying, she departed, and, preceded by two officers of the palace, was conducted to the room where the Emperor awaited her. He fixed his eyes stedfastly upon her for a moment as she entered—then advanced, as she would have knelt, prevented her from doing so, and led her to a seat.

Physiognomy is generally looked upon as an idle science, not, indeed, deserving of the name. All must admit that it is an uncertain one; but yet there is something in the human countenance, whether it be in feature or in expression, or in both combined, which has its effect upon every one. We judge by it, even when we

know not that we are judging; we act in consequence of its indications without being aware that we are influenced by it. The monarch, while he imagined that the girl Bertha was the daughter of the Count of Ehrenstein, had demeaned himself towards her in a very different manner from that which he now displayed towards Adelaide. It was that her appearance had produced a very different impression. There is an alchemy in a high heart, which transmutes other things to its own quality. He was calm and grave, but mild and kind; and, as he saw that his fair visitor was somewhat agitated, he soothed her tenderly, more in the tone of a father than a sovereign.

"Do not be alarmed, my dear young lady," he said: "I am neither going to speak harsh words nor ask idle questions. Your whole tale has been told to me by lips that could not lie; therefore all discussion of the past is useless. It remains but for me to do the best I can to render you happy, to right what has been done wrong, and, if a fair opportunity be given me,

to temper justice, as far as possible, with mercy. With such purposes and such wishes, all I have to ask of you is, will you trust me?—will you place full confidence in me, and not act in any shape till I let you know the time is come?"

"Oh! sir," exclaimed Adelaide, in a tone of deep gratitude, "you are too kind and too noble for me to doubt you for an instant. Command, and I will obey."

"Well, then," replied the Emperor; "be prepared in an hour's time to set out on a journey of some length. A litter shall be ready for you, as you have already had much fatigue; —and fear not," he added, seeing that she cast down her eyes thoughtfully: "you will be surrounded by friends, and guarded against all danger."

"There is a lady here with me, sire," replied Adelaide, "whose fate, I feel, is in some way connected with mine."

"I know, I know," replied the Emperor, with a smile: "she will go with you; her pre-

sence is as necessary as your own, as doubtless you are well aware. And now, farewell. I will not keep you longer. Be ready, and fear nothing."

CHAPTER IX.

The sky was as black as ink; not a star was to be seen through the dark veil of clouds; no moon had yet risen to shed even a faint glimmer through the heavy vapours that overspread the heaven. Woods and hills were around, and all was darkness over the scene, except where from a tall and extensive building, with six long pointed windows on either side, streamed forth a red and somewhat sombre blaze, lighting some of the larger objects in the immediate neighbourhood: the large masses of an oak, a tall projecting rock, and a crucifix of stone mounted on six steps. It was the chapel between Hardtenburg and Mosbach, and the hour of midnight was nearly

come. On either side of the door of the chapel stood a man-at-arms of the house of Leiningen, with a broad battle-axe on his shoulder; and the large door itself was thrown back, emitting the light, as well as the windows. Within, the scene was somewhat striking. For many years the old building had not beheld such a light, for the abbey to which it had been formerly attached, had been suppressed about thirty years before, on account of gross irregularities, and the revenues attributed, part to the Bishop of Spires, and part to the Abbey of Limburg. Doubtless it was the intention of the authorities who performed this act of severity, that the chapel, which had been a great convenience to the neighbouring peasantry, should be kept up, and service performed therein; but, as in the act of suppression, it was not distinctly specified who was to bear the expenses of its maintenance, neither of the parties who benefited by the confiscation had thought fit to undertake the task: the service ceased; the

building was neglected; and ruin and dilapidation was fast taking hold of it.

Now, however, between each pair of the twelve tall columns that supported the broken roof, stood a man with a torch in his hand, the red glare of which poured over the gray stone-work, and showed even the green stains that damp winter had left upon the masonry. Just within the door stood a trumpeter with his trumpet in his hand; and at the farther end of the chapel, with one or two of his friends and attendants round him, his head somewhat bent, and his face thoughtful, stood Count Frederick of Leiningen. A little farther down, gathered together in a small knot under one of the arches, appeared four gentlemen wrapped in long, dark mantles, but bearing on their heels the gilded spurs of knighthood; and in various parts of the building, two or three other figures were seen, some with their countenances turned towards the light, some gazing forth from the windows. A number of seats were placed in a semicircle a few yards in

advance of the spot where the altar had stood, and a small table with a lamp, some writing materials, and an hour-glass, appeared in front of the settles. On either hand, behind Count Frederick of Leiningen, was a small arched doorway, leading probably into the rooms where the priest's vestments used formerly to be kept, and above the altar was a round window, the stained glass of which was still perfect.

As if somewhat impatient, Count Frederick twice advanced to the table, and looked at the hour-glass, and then, turning to one of those who were with him, he observed, "It is nearly out. Think you he will not come?"

"I hear the sound of horses, my lord," said one of the persons who had been standing near the window; "he is coming now. They seem a goodly troop, by the noise they make."

Count Frederick smiled; and in a few minutes, the Count of Ehrenstein, followed by a considerable number of armed men, entered the chapel.

His face was less gloomy than it had lately

been; and whatever he might feel, he greeted Count Frederick in friendly terms, but at the same time shaded his eyes with his hand, as if the glare affected them.

"Why, what a blaze!" he exclaimed; "do you not think, Leiningen, that we had better extinguish some of these torches? The Emperor, I find, is at Spires; his men are all about; and this may call attention to us and our proceedings."

"Be it as you will," replied Count Frederick; "but I have taken good care, my friend, to guard against all surprise. I have three hundred men, scattered in parties round, within the call of a trumpet."

The Count of Ehrenstein's face evidently fell, and he replied in a tone of some surprise, looking to his companions as he spoke, "Indeed!"

The Count took no notice of his exclamation, but ordered all the torches except two to be extinguished, and then, turning to the Count of Ehrenstein, inquired, "Had we not

better bid the trumpeter call upon Ferdinand of Altenburg to appear? It is now midnight; you see the sand is run out."

"Let us first take our places," said the Count of Ehrenstein, thoughtfully. "These four gentlemen, I presume, are those whom you have selected?"

"They are," replied Count Frederick; "you have Mosbach I see with you, but where is my old friend Sickendorf?"

"I left him to guard the castle," replied the Count; "but here are three others, knights, and of good degree."

"Well, then, let us take our seats," said Count Frederick, "and to the judgment of these noble gentlemen refer the free decision of all that may be brought before them. You and I, my friend, taking our places with them to witness and execute their judgment, but having no voice in their decision."

Thus saying, Count Frederick moved towards one of the two seats placed in the midst of the others, courteously waving the Count of

Ehrenstein to the one next to him on the right hand. It was the place of honour, but the latter would fain have declined it; for, by the position in which the several parties stood, it placed Count Frederick between himself and his followers, so that no private communication could be held by him with those whose judgment he might wish to influence. His old companion, however, courteously insisted on retaining his seat to the left, and the knights having taken their places, after some little debate on this point, Count Frederick said aloud:—

"To you, noble gentlemen, as men impartial and of true honour, we defer the cause which you will hear, calling upon you, however, most solemnly to remember your knightly oath, and to cast from your mind all prejudice, but judging solely according to your consciences in the sight of God. Now let the trumpeter go out, and call before us Ferdinand of Altenburg, according to his written word and promise. Let him be called three times;

and if he appear not, let judgment go against him."

The trumpeter went forth as he was ordered, and immediately after, there was heard a loud, shrill blast, and a voice pronouncing some words which could not be distinguished within. A short space of time then elapsed, and again the trumpet sounded, and the proclamation was repeated.

No one appeared, however, and the Count of Ehrenstein muttered between his teeth, "He comes not—I knew he would not."

"Patience, patience, my good friend," said Count Frederick; "many things come when we least expect them. Let the trumpet sound again, and we shall see."

Almost as he spoke the blast was repeated, and to the surprise of all, it was instantly echoed by another trumpet.

"He has got a herald with him, the mighty prince;" said Count Frederick's jester, who was standing behind.

Little attention, however, was bestowed

upon his words, for all eyes were eagerly bent forward upon the doorway of the chapel, and every ear turned to hear whether any one was approaching. The moment after, the sound of horses' feet beating the sandy road at a rapid rate, could be distinguished. They came quickly on, without pause till they reached the chapel, then halted, apparently opposite the crucifix, and a brief interval followed. Then approaching steps were heard, and the figures of several men were seen through the long aisle making straight towards the door. The first that entered, with bonnet on his head, and sword and dagger by his side, was Ferdinand of Altenburg. His look was calm and firm, his bearing was high and almost stern, and he walked on up the aisle without pause or hesitation, gazing over the faces of those before him with a stedfast and unwavering eye. Close upon his steps came four men completely armed, all except the head, which was covered only by the common velvet cap of the time; but the persons assembled round the

table remarked that each in his bonnet bore three long feathers, usually the sign of knightly rank; and as the eye dropped to the heel of each armed figure, the gilded spurs buckled to the broad strap across the instep, showed that the honours of chivalry had indeed been received. Most of them were men well advanced in life; and on the faces of two were sundry scars, as if from ancient wounds; but on those two countenances the eye of the Count of Ehrenstein fixed with an eager and inquiring look, and his cheek grew pale as they came nearer and more near.

"Surely," he exclaimed at length, "I have seen you before."

Whether the two knights did not perceive that his words were addressed to them, or whether they were unwilling to reply, they spoke not; and Ferdinand of Altenburg, taking another step forward, laid his hand upon the table, saying, in a firm, clear tone, "My lords and noble knights, I am here according to my word, to answer aught that may be brought against me,

and to pray your judgment in all causes between me and this good lord here present, he and I having both pledged ourselves to abide by your decision, in whatever the one may have against the other."

"Stay, stay, bold boy!" exclaimed the Count of Ehrenstein; "the cause we have here to try, is solely my charge against you, for treason against your sworn lord."

"Not so, noble sir," replied Ferdinand, calmly and respectfully; "such was not the tenor of my letter; therein I said that I would bow without appeal to the decree of this court in all matters between you and me, provided you would pledge yourself to do the same. To that pledge Count Frederick assented in your name, and to him I appeal as witness if I speak the truth."

"You do assuredly, young gentleman," replied Count Frederick; "such were the terms of the compact."

"I have been deceived," muttered the Count of Ehrenstein, bitterly, gnawing his lower lip.

"Bird-lime! bird-lime!" said the jester, from behind.

"Well," cried the Count, after an angry pause, "it matters not. Let it go forward: you can have no cause of complaint against me; and first, as in due order, I will call for judgment upon you. What you will deny and what you will admit, I know not; but I am armed with full proof of your base treachery, should your impudence fail you here, and you deny your guilt."

"My lord, I am here," replied Ferdinand of Altenburg, "to acknowledge and to justify every act that I have done. I refuse you, however, for my judge, as you are my accuser; and I call upon these noble gentlemen to pronounce a just sentence upon me, being ready to answer every question they may ask, truly and freely, as if I were before the throne of Heaven."

"What is the charge, my lord?" said one of Count Frederick's knights, turning to the

Count of Ehrenstein; "we must have it clearly stated, if you please."

"I have written it down here," said the Count of Ehrenstein: "it is this:" and he proceeded to read as follows:—"that he, Ferdinand of Altenburg, being my sworn retainer and customary man, eating my bread, and drinking my wine, and I—having the power of high and low justice in my own domains,—did, contrary to the laws and customs of the land, seduce the affections of my only daughter, Adelaide of Ehrenstein; and did with her, secretly and privately, and contrary to my knowledge and consent, contract marriage on the night of the fourteenth of this month, in the chapel of our Lady of Strangers, on the hill of Ehrenstein; and, moreover, that he, being imprisoned for judgment in my castle of Ehrenstein, did break forth thence, and fly from the award of my court; and that he did persuade and induce my daughter aforesaid to fly with him, or to follow after, to the great wrong and detriment of his sworn lord. That is the

charge. I can prove it fully; and I claim judgment of death against him, according to the law."

As he spoke, he laid the paper on the table, and the knight, on his right, took it up and read it over again in silence.

"You hear the charge, Ferdinand of Altenburg," said the gentleman when he had done perusing it, "and you have expressed a determination to confess freely all that you have done. It will save us much time and trouble, if, as I read these charges over to you once again, you separately state which of them you acknowledge to be true, and which of them you deny. After you have done so, we will examine the proofs of all that you declare to be false, and then, upon the whole, hear your defence. Is there any one who can write here?"

The knights around were silent; but Count Frederick's chaplain came forward, saying, "I can, noble sir."

"Then let me ask you, Father, to take down

this young gentleman's replies," said the knight who had before spoken; and as soon as the chaplain was seated, he continued, addressing Ferdinand of Altenburg, "Do you acknowledge that you are the sworn retainer and customary man of the noble Count of Ehrenstein?"

"No, I am not," answered Ferdinand of Altenburg, in a firm and decided tone.

The Count of Ehrenstein looked round to Karl von Mosbach with a laugh, saying, "We will soon prove that."

But the knight who had spoken waved his hand impatiently, saying, "The proofs hereafter.—Do you acknowledge, Ferdinand of Altenburg, that you did seduce the affections of the Lady Adelaide of Ehrenstein, and contract marriage with her in secret, on the night of the fourteenth of this month, in the chapel of our Lady of Strangers, on the hill of Ehrenstein?"

"I did win her love," replied Ferdinand, boldly, "and I did contract marriage with her

at the place and on the night you have mentioned; but neither contrary to law, nor without right, but fully justified in all I did."

"Bold, on my life!" said the Count, setting his teeth hard. "Would I had you for an hour within the walls of Ehrenstein!"

Ferdinand made no reply, and the knight, after looking over the priest till he had finished writing the answer, turned again to the paper containing the charges, and went on to inquire:—

"Did you, Ferdinand of Altenburg, being imprisoned, and awaiting judgment of the court of the Count of Ehrenstein, break forth and fly to escape the award of the said court?"

"No," answered Ferdinand, again; "I left the castle of Ehrenstein as I would leave my own house, with full right and power to do so. I was not imprisoned to await the judgment of any lawful court, but was held by very empty bonds, that I might be done to death privately, as yon knight, Karl von Mosbach, knows right well."

The old soldier looked down with an embarrassed air, and played somewhat nervously with the hilt of his dagger; but Ferdinand, after having eyed him for a moment, went on, "I may as well answer the last charge at once, to save further trouble. I did not induce the Lady Adelaide to fly with me, though, as her husband and her rightful lord, I was fully entitled to take her whither I pleased; but I held no communication with her, and indeed, I could not."

"What does he mean," cried Karl von Mosbach, anxious to escape from the immediate question of what was the Count's object in placing the young gentleman in confinement—"what does he mean by his not being a sworn retainer and customary man of my good lord the Count? Why, a dozen of us heard him take the oath."

"Let us proceed in order," said the other knight; and taking up the paper which the priest had written, he continued:—"Thus, then, stands the case: Ferdinand of Altenburg

acknowledges that he did, as he is charged, contract marriage secretly with the Lady Adelaide of Ehrenstein; but he denies that he was then the sworn retainer and customary man of the Lord of Ehrenstein. Perhaps we had better keep this part of the charge separate from the rest, as his guilt or innocence, both in regard to the act which he acknowledges, and to all the other charges, must depend upon whether he was or was not, at the time of this marriage, what is here stated, namely, the sworn retainer and customary man of him whose daughter he secretly married. What is your proof, my lord of Ehrenstein, that he is that which you have stated?"

"It shall be quite sufficient," answered the Count; "there are three or four men here present who have heard the oath taken by him, Ferdinand of Altenburg, when admitted to serve in arms. Here, Albert, come forward. Were you, or were you not present when that youth took the usual oath?"

A stout soldier stepped forward with some

degree of reluctance apparent in his countenance and manner; but the question being repeated, he replied, "I was: we all take it."

"Repeat the precise words of the oath," said the knight.

The man rubbed his head, as if to awaken memory, and then answered, "As far as I can recollect, it was to serve my lord, in arms, well and truly, and to defend him in life and goods at the peril of his head."

Count Frederick's knights looked at each other, and the one who had been the only spokesman said, "This renders him an armed retainer in military service, but not a customary man. Where is the proof of that?"

"It is a fact of common notoriety," answered the Count of Ehrenstein, "that he for years has taken my bread and wine, and that, together with this oath, makes him my customary man."

"Nay," replied the knight; "he might be your guest, my noble lord. There is more required to show him your customary man

than that. Have you given him wages or hire, fee or reward?"

"Wages or hire he has not had," answered the Count of Ehrenstein; "for he had ever money of his own; but he has had arms and horses of me."

"Fine fee or reward that," cried the jester from behind; "the means of getting his skull cracked, or breaking his neck."

"This is something in the shape of recompense, assuredly," said Count Frederick's knight, musing.

"You seem learned in the law, sir," said the Count of Ehrenstein, with a sneer.

"I am, my good lord," answered the knight, with cold calmness. "I have studied the laws and customs of knighthood and nobility since first I buckled on my spurs, now five-and-twenty years ago; and I have often found the knowledge serviceable to myself and others, as here also it is likely to prove. But let us proceed: you have given this young gentleman arms and horses, you say, as recompense and wages for the services he has sworn to

perform. It is a somewhat doubtful point whether this will render him your man; but I think it will, if ——"

"Ha!" cried the Count, "what is the *if?* The case is as clear as light. He is my man; and I claim him as such. Where is there an *if?*"

"I was about to show you," said the knight; "for there are several conditions which would bar your claim. He must have received them and acknowledged them as payment, not as a free gift, not as a loan to serve you with in war. He must be of inferior degree."

"I thank you, noble sir," said Ferdinand of Altenburg, interposing, "for your strictness in seeing justice done me; but I will avail myself of no doubtful points of law to shield what I have done. The Lady Adelaide's love I have won, the Lady Adelaide's hand I have gained. I have done it boldly, and boldly will I justify it; denying all power in her father to judge me as his man, or to do aught but treat me as noble to noble. He has no law that can touch me; he has no

authority that can bind me. I here proclaim, and by this I will abide, that by no possibility could I ever become his man, though he might become mine. Nay more, I say that his bread I have never eaten; that his wine I have never drunk; that his horses or arms have I never received; that to the Count of Ehrenstein have I taken no oath."

"The youth is mad," exclaimed the Count; and all present looked from one to the other with surprise, as boldly and even vehemently Ferdinand of Altenburg poured forth such startling assertions.

"Ay, he is mad enough," said old Carl von Mosbach; "that is clear."

"Pray, good youth," said the Count, with a look of contemptuous pity, "by what title have you fed in my castle, ridden with my band, or used my arms, and in what position do you stand as to the oath between us?"

"As your sovereign lord," replied Ferdinand of Altenburg, in a clear distinct voice. "As the head of your house, the chief of your name; and you as my poor kinsman without

wealth, or land, or station. The bread I ate, the wine I drank, was mine, from my own fields and vineyards; the horses, arms, are all my own. The castle in which you held me was mine, and Ferdinand of Ehrenstein is not come here so much to answer your vain charge, as to claim his own. Whisper not to Mosbach, my good uncle, with so pale a cheek. The troops with which you so carefully surrounded me here this night, thinking—if those noble knights acquitted me—to secure your prey in violation of your word, are prisoners and disarmed; and Mosbach can do nothing of all that you would wish him. Ay, noble Count Frederick, you may well gaze at him with surprise; for though you doubted some foul play, as I judged by the precautions you had taken, you know not the extent of the treachery, and that every vassal from the lands of Ehrenstein, far outnumbering your parties, have been drawn round us, like a net to catch the deer. But his craft has fallen upon his own head; and the castle,

which he thought secure when he left it, is now beyond his power. He stripped it of all that could defend it, and now it is safe enough; but in other hands."

At this last intimation the Count of Ehrenstein startled up and laid his hand upon his sword, with his eyes flashing fire, and exclaiming, "Liar and villain! do you come here with such an idle tale, trumped up by your crafty uncle, to thrust his brother's bastard into the patrimony of a noble house. I can prove that you are the child of Charles of Altenburg. Out upon it! Listen not to him, noble knights; but proceed to judgment on this foul calumniator. Count Frederick, my noble friend, you will not doubt me, I am sure. I brought with me but what force was needful to guard me in these troublous times, and if that youth has dared with any bands — perchance the remnants of Eppenfeld's force—to ——"

"I will confound you in a moment!" cried Ferdinand of Altenburg, in a loud voice.

"Ho! without there! Bring in the Baron of Eppenfeld. Now, sir, if, in your heart, there be secrets connected with this man that you would have concealed; if you have plotted, colleagued, deceived with him; if, for dark and secret purposes, you obtained him as your prisoner from your noble friend there, and then, having driven your bargain with him, set him free to commit fresh crimes—tremble, I say; for every long-hidden act is about to be made manifest. Deep, deep, did you think them covered by the blackest shade of night; but, thanks to the care and foresight of the eyes that were upon you, they have all been gathered and recorded so as to leave you no escape. Every foul crime of the last twenty years shall now be blazoned to the eyes of the world; and your charge against your brother's son, shall be the spell that dissolves even the silence of the tomb."

"Stay, stay," exclaimed Count Frederick of Leiningen, as the Count of Ehrenstein sank back, pale and quivering, against the column

behind him. "These are bold assertions, young gentleman; and should be proved calmly and deliberately; perhaps were better proved more privately and temperately."

"What! shall I be temperate when my father's blood cries out for vengeance," exclaimed Ferdinand; "shall I be temperate when my mother's voice rises from the depth of the waters, and demands punishment on her murderer? Proved! my Lord Count; I call upon you as knight, and noble, true, and loyal —and such I hold you to be, if ever yet man was so—to say here, in presence of all, if, in the castle of Eppenfeld, you did not find, if even now you do not hold in your hands, the proofs of this man's treachery towards his brother's wife and child?"

"Thus adjured, I must not deny it," answered Count Frederick, in a firm but sad tone. "I did find proofs indubitable, that the late Count of Ehrenstein, left behind him a widow, an Italian lady of high rank, and one boy—who might now be of the age of this young man;

and, moreover, that practices most terrible had been used against their lives."

"Still we shall need evidence to show that this young gentleman is the child so left," said the knight who had chiefly conducted the proceedings of the court, on the charges against Ferdinand of Altenburg. "If he can bring forth proof of that fact, of course the accusation against him falls to the ground."

"And I can bring such proof," replied Ferdinand. "Here are my witnesses beside me."

As he spoke, two of the armed men who had accompanied him, advanced, and the elder laid a paper on the table saying, "I tender a copy of proofs of marriage between Ferdinand Charles, Count of Ehrenstein, and the Lady Eleanora Sforza, laid before the Imperial chamber, and registered after examination; and also of the birth of one son, baptized by the name of Ferdinand, issuing from the same marriage."

"And I tender proofs," said the other knight, "of the arrival of the same lady

and her child at Nuremberg, in the month of August, 14—."

"We are witnesses to the marriage, to the baptism of the child, and to the passing of the same lady and her son, as far as Augsburg, in the month of September, in the year preceding," said one of the two elder knights, who had not yet spoken; "and that at that time she went under the assumed name of Meissen."

"I will now call farther witnesses," said Ferdinand, in a lower tone than he had yet used, and gazing with feelings difficult to define upon the bowed figure of the Count, as he sat, apparently almost crushed to the earth with the torrent of discovery and disgrace which had poured upon him, "and God is my witness that I do all this with deep regret. But though the task is a bitter one, yet it must be accomplished. First, I will call the Baron of Eppenfeld to shew ——"

"Stay," cried the Count, rousing himself by a great effort; "young man, you play your

part boldly, so boldly that I — even I am inclined to believe, you credit the tale you tell. I know you well, Ferdinand of Altenburg, and am aware that you are not by nature a good dissembler. Either you must have faith in what you say, or you must have learned the great trade of the world quickly."

"Grace after meat is a good rule," cried the jester, "but I never yet did hear of so much grace after a bad supper."

"Nevertheless," continued the Count of Ehrenstein, without heeding the interruption, "this cause cannot be judged by this court. Long and close examination, thorough scrutiny of every proof, and the presence of men well versed in the law, is ever required to convey rich lands and lordships from a possessor of well nigh twenty years to a new upstart claimant, first heard of but yesterday."

"It required fewer formalities, it seemed," said the jester, "to convey his head from his shoulders, though, after all, to my thinking, a man's head is his best possession, for with-

out it he will want the chief of his title-deeds."

"Pshaw!" cried the Count, "this is no jesting matter. I boldly pronounce this claim to be false and fabricated, and I appeal to the court of the Emperor."

He spoke in a loud and resolute tone; and instantly a voice from the farther part of the chapel answered, "So be it!"

The view down the nave had been obstructed by the forms of Ferdinand and his four companions; and since he had entered, a number of persons, retainers of the two Counts and others, had gathered round to hear the proceedings; but at the sound of that voice every one turned his head, and then drew somewhat back. A lane was formed—the light of the two torches farther down streamed through—and a tall figure was seen advancing with slow and stately steps towards the place where the judges sat.

CHAPTER X.

COUNT FREDERICK of Leiningen immediately rose from his seat, gazing forward, as the figure we have described advanced up the nave of the chapel; and, at the same time, a number of voices exclaimed, "The Emperor! the Emperor!" Though several steps before any of his attendants, however, the Emperor was not alone. The clanging step of armed men was heard behind him; knights, officers, and soldiers were seen pouring in at the doors of the chapel; a great part of the lower end of the nave, and both the aisles behind the columns were crowded with forms, faintly seen in the dim glare of the two torches; and nought was left vacant but a space of about

twenty feet in front of the spot where the judges sat. The face of the Count of Ehrenstein turned deadly pale; and his look was certainly not one of satisfaction at the speedy opportunity afforded of trying the appeal he had just made. A smile of joy beamed upon the lip of Ferdinand of Altenburg, as he drew back with those who had accompanied him, to allow the monarch to pass; but old Karl von Mosbach, though every one else rose, still kept his seat, with his teeth chattering in his head, as he gazed round, and saw all means of escape cut off by the armed men who crowded the chapel.

With a firm, proud step, and eyes bent sternly forward, his bonnet and plume upon his head, and his mantle thrown back from his shoulders, the Emperor advanced up the aisle, having his sheathed sword unbuckled in his left hand.

"Well met, knights and nobles," he said, coming near the table; "what cause judge you here, with our Imperial Court so near as Spires?"

"We knew not, my lord, when this meeting was appointed, that you were so soon expected," said Count Frederick of Leiningen, "or we might have referred the trial of the case to you; but this young gentleman voluntarily submitted himself to the judgment of those here assembled; and it was agreed, on both parts, that there should be no appeal—though this good Lord of Ehrenstein has thought fit to make one."

"There must ever be an appeal to the Imperial Court," said the monarch, moving round to take the seat which Count Frederick had placed for him, in the centre of the table. "No agreement can frustrate the laws of this empire. Therefore the Count's appeal is good; and we will hear it this night, having already some cognizance of the questions in debate."

Thus saying, he seated himself, laying his sheathed sword upon the table, and waving his hand to some gentlemen who had followed him more closely than the rest of his train. Six of these immediately advanced, and arranged themselves round the table, as if

about to form a new court. The knights and gentlemen who had accompanied Count Frederick of Leiningen and the Count of Ehrenstein, looked at each other and their lords with a glance of hesitation, not knowing whether to withdraw or not; and while Count Frederick turned his eyes to the Emperor, the Count of Ehrenstein bent his upon the ground, by no means well satisfied, notwithstanding the favour the Emperor had shewn his appeal, that his cause should be tried by a tribunal completely independent of his influence.

After a moment's wavering doubt, one or two of those who had previously occupied seats round the table, took a step back, as if to withdraw, and give up their places to the Imperial Councillors; but the Emperor stopped them, saying, "Stay, gentlemen, stay; we will have your assistance likewise, as you have already heard this cause in part; and we will abridge some forms, to come at the truth. Who is this young gentleman that

stands before us, with two of the officers of our own court, and some other knights, whom we do not know?"

Before any one could answer in a more formal manner, the Count of Ehrenstein exclaimed, vehemently, "This, my lord the Emperor, is the bastard son of Charles, Count of Altenburg, brought up by cunning Brother George, the monk, and tutored by him to steal away my daughter, and to put in a false claim to my inheritance."

"How is this, young man?" said the Emperor, looking gravely at Ferdinand of Altenburg; "is this charge true? I pray you, remember that this shall be sifted to the very bottom, and the severest punishment of the law shall fall upon him who speaks falsely. Answer me,—is this true?"

"It is false, my lord," replied Ferdinand, in a calm, firm tone; "I claim here, before your court, to be received and acknowledged as Count of Ehrenstein, and to receive the lands and lordships thereof, doing homage,

and rendering service for them as fiefs of the empire; and I am ready, even now, to prove my title; so that there shall be no doubt left."

"Ah! you are well-tutored, I can believe," exclaimed the Count; but Ferdinand went on, not heeding his interruption, saying, "I have already tendered proofs from the Imperial Chancery, of the marriage of my late father, the Count of Ehrenstein, and also of my own birth."

"Of the birth of a son," exclaimed the Count of Ehrenstein; "a son, who perished afterwards, as well as his mother."

"Well, then," cried the Emperor, turning to him quickly, "you admit the marriage of your brother, and the birth of a son issuing from that marriage?"

The Count of Ehrenstein was silent, gnawing his under lip, and fixing his eyes upon the table; but Count Frederick of Leiningen replied to the Emperor's question, "He cannot deny it, mighty lord; proofs that admit of no

doubt are now in the hands of these two noble knights; officers, as I understand, of your Imperial Court."

"This simplifies the question greatly," said the Emperor; "let me look at the papers."

The officers who had before produced them immediately presented them to their Imperial Lord, who examined them closely, looked at the seals and the numerous signatures of authentication, and then returned them, saying, "They are in due form, and perfect in every respect. There can be no doubt. This part of the case is proved; it remains for you, young gentleman, to establish on unquestionable evidence that you are the son thus born, otherwise these facts go for nothing."

"It shall be done, my lord, clearly and step by step; but I would fain know whether your Majesty judges best, that I should commence from the period of this son's birth, and trace his life downward, till you find him here before you, or to go back from the present with my past history, till it connects itself

with that of the son of whose birth you have proof."

"The latter were the better course," said the Emperor; "for, as things that have lately happened are more likely to be within men's memories than things remote, we shall more speedily and easily arrive at a flaw, if there be one."

"The last twelve years of my life, my lord," replied Ferdinand, "are known to many here present. During that period, or nearly that period, I have dwelt in the castle of Ehrenstein, first as a page, then as a squire to my uncle, calling himself Count of Ehrenstein—is this admitted, or does it require proof?"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Count of Ehrenstein; "we all know the kindness that for twelve years you have received at my hands, and how you have repaid it. It is admitted, ay, and proved, that for that time you have been a retainer in the castle of Ehrenstein; but who placed you there?"

"Father George of Altenburg," replied the

young gentleman, "by whom, during the two years preceding, I was educated at the abbey of ——"

"To be sure," exclaimed the Count again, "who should educate his brother's bastard but the monk?"

"To refute this," replied Ferdinand of Altenburg, "I will call the monk himself, who can prove from whose hands he received me."

"Let the monk be called," exclaimed the Emperor; "summon Father George of Altenburg by the sound of the trumpet. We must have his evidence, or adjourn our sitting."

These words gave a fresh hope to the Count of Ehrenstein; for to have delayed the investigation, even for a short time, would have delivered him from the immediate presence of the Imperial guards, whose proximity did not at all please him, and would have enabled him to employ any of those many means of resisting right, which were often resorted to successfully in those days. But the instant after, a trumpet sounded at the door of the chapel, and the

name of Father George was pronounced. After a moment's pause, the crowd that filled the lower part of the building, began to move and fall back on either hand, and the tall form and fine countenance of the monk was seen advancing up the aisle.

"This is all concerted," muttered the Count of Ehrenstein to himself; "the cause is judged before it is heard."

The Emperor, however, without noticing his half audible words, raised his voice and addressed Father George of Altenburg, even before he had reached the table, saying, "Father, we have ever heard that you are a good and holy man, and we now call upon you to speak truth, and to tell us who is that young man now standing before us, as you will answer to God."

"This," said Father George, laying his left hand upon Ferdinand's shoulder, "is Ferdinand of Ehrenstein, the son of my beloved friend, the late Count."

"Can you prove this fact?" inquired the monarch; "for this is a matter of serious im-

port, and we must not decide hastily, even upon the shewing of a holy man like you. From whom did you receive this boy, that you so well know he is Ferdinand of Ehrenstein?"

"From his own mother, my lord the Emperor," replied Father George; "that is to say, not from her own hands; for unhappily I was not present when she was seized with the fever at Nuremburg; but at the point of death, when she had received extreme unction, and had taken leave of all worldly things, she sent him to me by one who had been faithful and true to her, and who brought him safely to the abbey, and delivered him into my hands, in the time of Abbot Waldimer."

"But what proof had you that this was the son of the Countess of Ehrenstein; how did you know that it was not the son of some one else?"

"I had often seen the boy before;" replied Father George: "from his infancy up to that hour, I had never been two months without holding him on my knee. He changed, it is true,

from the soft infant in the nurse's arms, to the light, wild, vigorous boy; but in that slow and gradual change something still remained which shewed the same being was there before my eyes: one day bore over to the next the lineaments of my dead friend's child; and though in each two months I could see a difference in the boy, yet there were the same eyes looked upon me, the same lips smiled when I spoke to him. It was like a sapling that I watched and nourished, increasing in height, putting forth leaves and flowers, but still the same, whether as the tall tree or the young shoot."

"You say a faithful servant brought him to you," said the Emperor, after pausing a moment, when Father George had done speaking; "is that person still living?"

"He is, my lord, and is here," answered the monk.

"Call him," rejoined the Emperor; and Father George raising his voice, pronounced the name of Franz Creussen, when immediately

from one of the side aisles, pushed forward between the columns the gigantic form of the blacksmith: no longer, indeed, in the garb of his trade, but armed from the neck to the heel in black armour. His head alone was bare, with the short, curly hair sweeping round his bold face,

"Ah! our good friend the blacksmith, who shod my horse the other day in the woods," exclaimed the Emperor; "but how is it, friend? You seem to have changed your trade."

"But taken up my old one, Kaiser," answered the deep thundering voice of Franz Creussen. "I was bred to arms, and hammered on enemies' heads before I touched an anvil."

"Then how came you to change one profession for the other?" asked the Emperor.

"Oh, every man has many reasons for one thing," said Franz Creussen; "mine were partly a fondness for iron, partly to gain my bread at a time when no wars were going on, partly to watch and protect this boy, my dead lord's child."

"Then you, too, know him to be the son of the late Count of Ehrenstein?" said the Emperor.

"He was the late Count's lady's son," answered Franz Creussen, bluffly; "and the Count never doubted he was his own."

"And did you bring him to Father George," inquired the Emperor, "at his mother's death?"

"The case is this, my lord," replied the blacksmith: "I never quitted the dear good lady for any length of time, from the hour when we set out from Venice, till the hour when she told me to carry the lad to Father George of Altenburg, and made me swear that I would watch and guard him at the peril of my life. I was not always with her, I was not always in the house; for when we arrived at Augsburg, we had notice that yon lord, the Count's brother, had seized upon the lands, had strangled poor Rudolf of Oggersheim, who bore him the tidings of his brother's fate, and had set men to waylay us and destroy us, so that he might enjoy the inheritance in peace. It was needful,

therefore, to keep quiet, and to watch shrewdly, too; and I, with the rest of the men, kept guard about the place, riding here, and riding there, for news, till we were all obliged to fly together, having tidings from Father George here, that the Baron of Eppenfeld had set out with all his band, to carry off the lady and her child, and drown them in the Danube, by orders of yon lord."

"It is false!" cried the Count of Ehrenstein; "it is a bitter falsehood!"

"False!" thundered Franz Creussen; "if I had you on this side of the table, I would cleave you to the jaws;" and he ran his hand angrily over his heated brow; but the next minute he added with a laugh: "I will do better, I will convict you. I have a witness here you wot not of.—Ho! my men, bring in the prisoner, bring in the Baron of Eppenfeld.— The truth shall appear at length, Count William. Ha! you tremble and turn pale, to find that he whom you let out of Ehrenstein has fallen into the hands of Franz Creussen."

The Count of Ehrenstein remained silent; and well he might, for there, in the presence of the Emperor, guarded by two stout soldiers, stood the Baron of Eppenfeld, with the same look of careless, almost gay, indifference which we have seen him bear on so many and so varied occasions, without a touch of fear, of embarrassment or remorse.

"Ah! plunderer and knave, have you been caught at length?" exclaimed the Emperor, with his eyes flashing, as he gazed upon the Baron. "By the Lord that lives! I will put down such as you within this empire, so that the memory of your cruel deeds and of your terrible punishment shall become a tale to frighten children with."

"Faith! my good Lord," replied the Baron; "if you do that, you will have to sweep your house clean; for I am not one whit worse than at least a half of your good nobles, only I have done what I thought fit to do somewhat more openly. To take men's purses sword in hand, to my mind, is not half so bad as to rot their

reputation with a smooth tongue; to make men's merchandise pay toll on the highways of the world is a better deed than to ruin them by false accusations; to fight against strong men with harness on their backs, better than to skin poor boors alive who have no means of defending themselves."

"There is some truth in what you say," replied the Emperor; "yet you shall find that other men's crimes shall not excuse your own. Now, what know you of this lord of Ehrenstein, here?"

"Oh, I know a good deal," answered the Baron, with a careless laugh; "but look you, Lord Emperor, you have used sharp words to my ear, and if I take your meaning rightly, you intend to use a sharp axe on my neck. Now, I say, out upon those fools who babble when they die! The wolf, the wolf is the brave beast who will not give one howl when the dogs worry him. If there be any profit in speaking, I will speak; but if I am to go on the long march, I will troop off in silence. If there be any choice

which is to go, the Lord of Ehrenstein or I, why, I would decline the honour, and beg him to lead the way; but if I am to go at all events, I do not need his company. I can travel alone quite well to the low bed in the dark house."

"Your very words are a confession, robber," replied the Emperor; "and you shall die whether you speak or not. I will not barter justice due on one man's head, even for evidence against another, perhaps not less guilty."

"I can supply the testimony he refuses to give, mighty lord," said Count Frederick of Leiningen, in a grave tone. "It is with deep regret that I place in your Majesty's hands these papers, taken by me when we stormed the castle of Eppenfeld. I have looked over them, and have held them until now, in the hope that one who was a companion of my boyhood would show some signs of repentance for deeds so black as those disclosed this night; but now I am bound to give them up, that justice may be done. You will there see the price given,

or offered, for the death of Ferdinand of Ehrenstein and his mother, and will find full proof of the truth of all that good Franz Creussen has advanced."

The Count of Ehrenstein folded his arms upon his chest, and raised his head haughtily. "All are against me here," he said, in a stern and bitter tone. "My lord the Emperor, I did not come here prepared for these charges. False and groundless I pronounce them to be; and false and groundless I will prove them; but I still require time to call my own evidence, and to send for some who are now at a distance, but who can show that this accusation has been devised to ruin me; that those papers are fabricated; and that this Baron of Eppenfeld has long threatened me with disclosing the pretended treachery on my part against my brother's widow, sometimes affirming, sometimes denying—ay, even in writing—that his charge was true. Here is one present,—this very reverend priest, the chaplain of Count Ferdinand,—who has seen

his denial of all these charges; nay, more, who even saw him sign it, and read it over to him."

"Ha! ha! ha! my friend, the knave!" cried the Baron of Eppenfeld. "Say you so?—say you so? What, these are all lies of my invention, are they? 'Tis good—'tis mighty good. But now, remember, I spare you no more. I was quite ready to do you a good turn, and die—if needs must be—without speaking; but now you turn so ungratefully upon me, all the truth shall out."

"You see, my mighty lord," said the Count, turning to the Emperor, "that he is moved by every breath of passion, and not by the simple voice of truth. Let the priest speak. Did he, or did he not, my reverend friend, sign a paper, denying all these charges to be true, after having heard every word written therein read clearly over to him?"

"Even so," answered the priest, in a deliberate tone; "he heard the paper read, and made some marks meant for his name, though

the othography was aught but good; and at the same time he told me, by way of protest, that he signed to save his life, which you had threatened to take, by secret means, in prison —to gain a chance of liberty, which you had promised, and to obtain a certain sum of money, which was to be added, to send him on his way."

There was a deep silence for a minute, while all eyes were fixed upon the Count of Ehrenstein, whose eyes seemed to grow dim and glassy, and whose cheek was deadly pale. It was he himself who spoke first, however, saying, in a faltering tone, "I claim time, my lord; I claim time to meet an accusation long prepared and carefully devised, and to bring forward proofs that this youth is not what he pretends to be."

"Time you shall have, sir," replied the Emperor, sternly, "to meet the dark charges brought against you. It is but right you should; and we will see justice done you on that score; though, if it be proved that this

young gentleman is Count of Ehrenstein, to his court, as your sovereign lord, for all lands you hold, are you amenable for all crimes done against him. You shall have time, as I have said; but it shall be in sure custody. Ho! Count Rudolph, advance, and receive the body of William, calling himself Count of Ehrenstein, to produce before our Imperial Court, at Spires, when need shall be, on peril of all that you can forfeit to the empire."

Count Rudolph, of Schönborn, came forward with two men-at-arms, and laid his hand upon the Count of Ehrenstein's shoulder, saying, "Your sword, my good lord."

The Count gave it up, without vain resistance; and the Emperor leaned his head upon his hand, with his eyes fixed upon the papers, as if lost in thought of their contents. At length, after a silent pause of more than a minute, Ferdinand—whom we have called of Altenburg—advanced a step, and said, in a low and deferential voice, "I pray you, mighty

sir, to judge at once the cause between me and my uncle here present, concerning the lands of Ehrenstein. He came hither, pledging himself to abide, in all things betwixt him and me, by the decision of the noble gentlemen whom you found here assembled. Upon an after-thought, he appealed to your Imperial Majesty; and though he was barred by previous renunciation, I am as ready to submit to your high judgment as he can be; but I would fain have it speedy, as my men even now hold the castle of Ehrenstein, which he left nearly ungarrisoned, in order to seize me here, if the cause should go against him. Now I am not disposed to hold, even for an hour, that which is not mine; and if my claim be not made good this night, I am ready to withdraw my people from his house."

"You speak well, young gentleman," said the Emperor; "and it is but fit that, ere the deep and terrible accusation which has been urged before us be tried upon its merits, we should know whether you be his vassal or he

yours. As far as we have hitherto gone, the weight of proof seems in your favour; and, casting aside all consideration of the crimes with which he is charged, we will freely examine your title as you can further prove it. Remove that Baron of Eppenfeld, till we can deal with him further."

"Stay, stay," cried the Baron, shaking off the hands of two stout soldiers, who were about to take him somewhat unceremoniously from the Emperor's presence; "I can tell you something that will soon settle all your doubts, if you will promise me good meat and drink.—I mean warm wine of Ingelhiem, or better still, of Eberbach, till I die."

"That you shall have," said the Emperor, with a smile crossing his face against his will, "if you do clear up all doubts. What is it you have to say?"

"This," replied the Baron: "When I was setting out for Augsburg, to do the bidding of my noble friend the Count here, he informed me, in order to make right sure that I fell into

no mistake regarding his nephew, that the poor man he put to death had told him there was a cross marked in deep blue upon the boy's left side, above the heart—stamped there by magic, for aught I know, but so that no water would bring it out—in memory of his father's journey to the Holy Land. They are the Count's own words. I am not sure that you may not find them there in the letter; for I read little, and write less; so that—as time flies, and memories fly with it—I know not whether the hint was written or spoken; but be you sure that if the mark be on his breast, he is the heir. If not, he may be any man else's son, but not the late good Count of Ehrenstein's—a worthy man he was as ever drew a sword."

"Ha!" said the Emperor, fixing his eyes upon him; "I thought he had been your enemy, and curbed, with a strong hand, your lawless doings."

"Ay, my lord Emperor," answered the Baron; "but yet, though the lion rends us

and we fly him, we love him better than the wolf, and own him for a gallant beast. The last Count was fierce enough with us who live after the old fashion. He slew William of Feldhofen, and burnt the castle of John of Bernau; but yet he did it all manly, with notice given and banner on the wind; man to man, and lance to lance. He was a true friend or a true enemy, and not like that man, who will use and betray. But look to the boy's breast. I will swear that the words were spoken ——"

"They are written here," rejoined the Emperor; "but he calls the child in this letter his brother's bastard, and speaks of the mother as a concubine."

"That is disproved by these papers, and two competent witnesses, mighty lord," said the knight who had taken so active a part in examining the Count's charges against Ferdinand: "the only question remaining for decision is, whether this youth, who was placed by the good monk Father George

under the care of that noble lord, is the boy who came with the Countess of Ehrenstein from Venice."

"The monk declares it, and this good man, Franz Creussen, also," answered the Emperor; "but the latter is not of noble blood."

Franz Creussen laughed aloud. "Ah, ha!" he said, "as if an honest man were not an honest man, because he does not wear beasts and birds embroidered on his shirt. You have there a proof how a proud noble can lie and cheat;" and he pointed to the Count of Ehrenstein, adding, "but look at the boy's breast. His uncle writes to have the boy who was brought to Augsburg killed, and says he is marked with a cross. We say this is the boy; and if the cross be there, 't is proof, taken with our oaths. Then you have the testimony of two knights, and sundry papers, that the boy so brought was born in lawful wedlock. What want you more? But if you want it, you shall have it."

"What he says is true," replied the mon-

arch; "the mark here described, if found upon him, will be strong corroborative evidence."

"It is here, my lord," said Ferdinand, opening the bosom of his doublet; "I have borne it from a child;" and there, upon his left breast, appeared in faint blue lines, but perfectly distinct, the figure of a cross.

"Lucky you bathed not in the good Count's presence," said a voice behind Count Frederick of Leiningen; "or he would have had out the heart that pants beneath the cross."

"Well, noble lords," exclaimed the Emperor, not noticing this interruption, "you have heard the evidence in this strange case; and to you I will leave the judgment, reserving to myself to see it carried out, with all regard to speedy justice."

There was a short pause, and then the knight, who was fond of all the niceties of feudal law, observed, "This good man, Franz Creussen, has said there can be more evidence brought. It were well that we heard all that

can be testified, so that no doubt may remain on the mind of any one."

"Stay," said the Emperor: "ere you go farther, in order to give this lord the chance of atoning for the wrong he has done, and meriting grace from him whom he has wronged, let him be asked the question, Does he yield to testimony which to us seems most conclusive? —does he acknowledge that this is his brother's lawful son? Will he at once give up lands and lordships he unjustly holds, or will he resist, and have the whole knavery unravelled to the last thread?"

Few there present had looked at the face of the Count of Ehrenstein for some minutes, as he stood somewhat behind, with Count Rudolph's men-at-arms on either side; but had they turned their eyes that way they would have beheld the working of strong passions on a countenance long trained to withstand emotions, and still resisting in a degree their influence.

At first, and especially when the evidence of

the Baron of Eppenfeld was given regarding the cross, he had more than once seemed about to interrupt the proceedings with some vehement burst of passion; but gradually his countenance fell, his firmness seemed to forsake him. His cheek, indeed, could not well grow paler than it had been for some time; but his lip quivered, his eye sought the ground, his hands grasping his sword-belt moved convulsively, and even his cheeks looked wan and hollow. The last words of the Emperor he seemed hardly to hear; but when Count Rudolph repeated them to him, he started and replied, after a gasp for breath, "I appeal to a freer court—to a court——"

"A freer court!" exclaimed the Emperor in an angry tone, while Count Frederick of Leiningen whispered something to him; but ere the sentence was finished a loud voice seemed to the Count of Ehrenstein to cry, "A freer court you shall have. I summon you to the court of the dead! William of Ehrenstein, appear before the seat of your true judge!"

At the same moment it appeared to the eyes of the culprit, that the light of the two torches suddenly went out; the chapel was left almost in darkness, illuminated only by the small lamp that stood upon the table. The Emperor and all the knights rose and drew back, as if in fear; and by the faint rays that streamed down the aisle he beheld a change on the figures that crowded round. Armed men and officers, and forms robed in silks and furs disappeared; and sweeping up in a shadowy circle, there came a line of tall dark figures, each covered with a long gray garment not unlike a shroud. Each held in the gauntleted hand, not by the hilt, but by the cold blade, a naked sword; and behind the semicircle, which stretched from one side of the chapel to the other, rose a number of old dusty banners and pennons, tattered and soiled, and stained apparently with blood. A chair—moved forward by hands that were not seen—was placed in the midst, and one of the tall gray figures, with the hood of his robe falling far

over the face, and the folds enveloping the chin and mouth, seated itself therein, and waved the hand as if for silence. Instantly a trumpet was heard echoing round and round the old walls, and a solemn voice proclaimed, "William of Ehrenstein, appear before your liege lord and brother, dead in the year of grace 14—, and answer to the charge of treason and felony, for that you did incite his vassals to do him to death; for that you did slay in prison his faithful henchman, Rudolph of Oggersheim; for that you did attempt to murder his widow and his son, your lord. Stand forth, and answer to these charges, as God shall give you courage!" and again came a loud blast of the trumpet.

The Count of Ehrenstein felt himself free, for those who had stood beside him had drawn back. He gazed wildly round him—took a step forward—stretched forth his hands as if struck with sudden blindness, and then fell prone to the ground without sense or motion.

CHAPTER XI.

When the Count of Ehrenstein opened his eyes, it seemed to him as if he were in a dream, or as if he had been dreaming. The shrouded figures, the darkened chapel, all had passed away, and everything was restored to the same state as it had been before the awful apparition had presented itself to his sight. There sat the Emperor in the centre of the table, the knights forming the court were placed around. Ferdinand, Father George, Franz Creussen, and those who had followed them, stood in the centre aisle; the torches glared upon the walls and pillars, and the end of the nave was crowded with the gaily dressed nobles and officers of the Imperial Court. He himself,

supported by two guards, was seated on a settle, a few yards to the left of the Emperor; and Count Rudolph of Schönborn, with his arms crossed upon his chest, was gazing at him attentively, as if watching the progress of his recovery.

The next moment, the Emperor's voice was heard, saying, in a loud stern tone, "We can wait no longer; we must proceed to judgment."

"Stay, my lord, stay," replied Count Rudolph; "he revives, he is opening his eyes."

"Where am I?" murmured the Count, in a low tone. "What has become of them? Where have they gone to?"

"Whom do you mean?" asked Count Rudolph, gravely.

"My brother and his followers," said the Count, closing his eyes again, as if afraid of beholding some dreadful sight. I saw them there—there before me."

"Your brain has wandered, my good lord,"

said Count Rudolph; "all are here present who have been here to-night."

"It is a warning from Heaven," observed the voice of Father George, "calling upon a bad man, perhaps for the last time, to repent of what he has wrongly done, and to make restitution of what he unjustly holds. Let him obey the voice of conscience, before it be too late."

"Your last words, my lord," said Count Rudolph, "uttered just before you fell, were insulting to the Emperor and his court. You appealed to another tribunal; but, from what you have just said, it would seem that you were not then in command of your understanding. Doubtless, the Emperor will take this into consideration, and hear anything that you may have to say before he pronounces judgment between you and your nephew, as he is about to do."

The Count rose feebly, with a pale cheek and haggard eye; and Count Frederick of Leiningen, who was gazing at him, exclaimed,

in an eager and a friendly tone, "I beseech you, William of Ehrenstein, do justice, and remember equity. To every one here present, I believe, this case seems perfectly clear. Your brother's son stands before you—there cannot be a doubt of it. It is proved that he was born in lawful marriage; yield to him that which is rightly his; and, by a grateful acquiescence in that which you cannot prevent, atone for the past, and induce him not to inquire farther into deeds that it were best to leave obscure."

"A little comfortable darkness is not unpleasant to most men," said the jester, from behind his lord; but the Count of Ehrenstein waved his hand fiercely, exclaiming, "I will never yield that which is mine to this base tissue of forged evidence. My lands may be torn from me by the arm of power; but I will not consent to the tyranny that wrongs me."

"Have you aught more to say?" demanded the Emperor, gazing at him sternly. The Count was silent, rolling his eyes around, as if

seeking for something to reply, and finding naught; and the monarch, after a moment's pause, proceeded.

"To your judgment, noble lords, I leave this cause," he said. "You will consider, first, whether you have evidence sufficient; next, if you have, you will judge whether the claim of this young gentleman be, or be not, fully substantiated. I will have no voice therein, but leave you free to decide upon these questions, that no man hereafter may say you have been influenced by aught but your own sense of right and justice." Thus saying, he rose from his seat, and took two steps back, standing with his arms folded upon his chest, and his eyes bent upon the ground. A low and murmured consultation instantly took place amongst the gentlemen round the table; and, after a very short hesitation, the eldest rose, and, turning to the Emperor, said, "We have decided, my lord, that the evidence is fully sufficient."

"Then judge upon it," replied the Em-

peror, briefly. "I am here to see your judgment executed."

Again a low murmured consultation took place, and, once more, the old knight rose and said, "We find, upon the evidence tendered to us by Ferdinand, hitherto called of Altenburg, that he is the lawful son of the late Count Ferdinand Charles of Ehrenstein, and as such entitled to the lands, lordships, rights, and privileges of the house of Ehrenstein, upon doing due and customary homage, and rendering such service to the Imperial Crown as his predecessors have done before him."

There was a dead silence for a moment. The Count clenched his hands tight together, and gnashed his teeth; and then Count Frederick of Leiningen, and Father George of Altenburg, took Ferdinand by the hand, and led him between them to the Emperor. He was about to kneel, and tender homage at once; but the monarch took him in his arms, and embraced him, saying, "I give you joy, young sir, upon the recovery of your own.

Reserve your homage, however, for another day, when it shall be received in public, in our city of Spires. At present, there is another task before you, and one more form to be gone through, before I place you in that chair, to take the first steps in judging those who have wronged you. He then raised his voice, and said, aloud, "Let the trumpet sound, and the herald call upon any one who denies that Ferdinand, hitherto named 'of Altenburg,' is of right, Count of Ehrenstein, to come forward now, and shew cause why he should not be pronounced such by the Imperial Court, and received to homage accordingly. Sound!"

Instantly the trumpet sounded at the door of the chapel, and a herald made proclamation in due form. All men listened to the words in silence, not, indeed, expecting any reply, except it were from Count William.

To the surprise of all, however, a voice, not very far from where the Emperor stood, exclaimed aloud, "I do deny his title!"

There was a slight movement among the

crowd; the lords and knights made way for the appellant; all eyes from the other parts of the chapel turned in the direction of the altar, and wonder, not unmixed with scorn, was depicted on every countenance but two or three, when the jester advanced from the group around the Emperor, and took his way straight towards the chair in which the monarch had lately sat.

"What foolery is this?" cried one.

"Cast the mad fellow out!" said another.

"This is no time for such jests," said a third.

But, with a firm and lordly step, a head held high, and an air of dignity and command in his whole look, the jester walked up to the table, seated himself in the central chair, and then looking round to the knights who had pronounced judgment, he said, in a loud, clear voice, "You have pronounced that Ferdinand of Ehrenstein is the lawful son of Ferdinand Charles, upon good, just, and true evidence. But before you pronounce him Count of

Ehrenstein you must prove that Ferdinand Charles is dead."

Thus saying, he removed the unsightly cap from his head, and with it a large quantity of white hair, threw the bauble from his hand into the midst of the aisle, cast back the cloak from his shoulders, and gazed around him,—as lordly a man, in his presence and bearing, as any in the whole court.

As he did so, a cry, strange and horrible, came from the group on the left; and Count William of Ehrenstein darted forward, with his hands clasped tight together—gazed for an instant, with wild eagerness, in the face of him who had so boldly seated himself in the Emperor's chair—and then falling on his knees, exclaimed, "Ferdinand! Ferdinand!"

The multitude in the chapel seemed at once to conceive the whole; and a loud shout—the mixture of surprise and satisfaction — burst from them, and made the vaulted roof ring. At the same moment, too, good Franz Creussen strode up to the table, and taking the Count's

hand in his, wrung it hard, exclaiming, "Welcome to your own again, my good and noble lord!"

But how shall I depict all the varied expressions on the countenances of those who surrounded the table at that moment:—the joy, the surprise, the bewilderment in the face of Ferdinand of Ehrenstein;—the agony and despair in that of his uncle, as he still knelt, with the eye of his brother fixed even fiercely upon him; the look of terror and dismay of old Carl von Mosbach; and the calm and triumphant glance of satisfaction in the eyes of the two old knights who had accompanied Ferdinand thither, and of several other hardy warriors around.

Nor was there less pleasure in the aspect of Count Frederick of Leiningen, who, after having paused for a moment to let the first feelings have way, advanced, and laid his hand upon the shoulder of him who had so lately appeared as his jester, and said aloud, "This is Ferdinand Charles, Count of Ehrenstein, de-

livered by my assistance from the bonds of the infidel. No man, who knows him and looks upon him, will deny it; but, should there be any one bold enough so to do, I will prove the fact, either by my body against his in battle, or by the course of true evidence; showing that this noble Count has, ever since his captivity, been in constant communication with the Grand Master of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem; who, at his intercession and upon his bond, has ransomed, from time to time, every one of his companions made captive at the same time with himself; and would have ransomed him also, long ago, had not the sum demanded been utterly unreasonable. William of Ehrenstein, do you deny that this is your brother?"

"I do not," answered the unhappy man, bending his head down to the table, and covering his eyes with his hands. "It is—it is my brother. Fool that I was not to know him sooner!"

"Fool that you were, indeed," replied his

brother; "for fool must be every man who takes not warnings repeatedly given. You have had every means; you have had every chance. When I could have struck you in the halls that you had taken from my son,—when I could have punished you at the board, where you had no right to sit but as a guest,—when I could have made you bow the head amongst the soldiery, where you had no place but as a vassal—I forebore; although I knew you to be perfidious, blood-stained, cruel! But yet I hoped that there might be some grace left,—that some redeeming quality—some tardy repentance of error—might give room for clemency,—might excuse, to my own heart, the traitor against my own life, the plotter against my child, the persecutor of my wife, the assassin of a faithful though humble friend. Yet here, even here, to the very last, no touch of remorse has shaken you,—no shame has found place in your bosom. When proofs, as clear as day, have established rights of another and your own guilt, you have re-

sisted, with base and dishonourable subterfuges, the restitution of that to which you had no claim; and have striven to murder, with words, him whom your steel was impotent to reach. The day of mercy and tenderness is past; I have swept from my bosom every feeling of brotherly love—every memory of youthful hours—all the linked tenderness of young affections,—all the sweet bonds of the early heart. I deal with you as traitor, knave, assassin;—false to your brother and your lord; and henceforth, from me, hope neither grace, nor favour, nor compassion. Not as you have done to others will I do to you; but, with the stern and rigid arm of impartial justice, I will strike at proved crimes and wickedness unrepented.—My lord the Emperor," he continued, rising, "I have usurped this seat too long, and crave your gracious pardon; but at your hands I demand this man, my vassal and my liegeman, whom I formerly called brother, to deal with him, in my court, according as justice shall determine; and justice he shall

have, even to the uttermost jot, according to the laws and customs of the nobles of this realm."

While he spoke, the culprit had remained with his head bent down, and his face hidden; but the moment that the stern words left the Count's lips, his brother made a convulsive motion forward, and grasped his knees, exclaiming, "Ferdinand! Ferdinand! — Have mercy, have pity!"

But the Count spurned him from him, asking, in a deep fierce tone, "Have you had pity?" And as the unfortunate man fell back upon the pavement, there was a shrill cry—not exactly a shriek, but the sound of grief rather than of terror; and suddenly from between the pillars which separated the south aisle from the nave, a beautiful form darted forward, passed the knights before the table, passed the prostrate suppliant and his brother, passed Father George and the Emperor, and, advancing straight to Ferdinand of Ehrenstein, caught his hand, and, casting herself upon her knees

at his feet, raised that beautiful face toward him, exclaiming, "Ferdinand! Ferdinand! my husband, my beloved! Now, remember the promise that you made me, the oath you swore. Save my father: intercede for him—now, even now, when the warm gush of parental love must be flowing from the heart of him who has our fate in his hands, when the long yearnings of the soul to see his child must make his spirit tender. Save my father—save him, my husband; by your oath, by our hopes, by our mutual love. Kneel to him—I will kneel too."

Ferdinand replied not but by a mute caress; but then advancing, he bent his knee before the Count, saying, "My father!" Adelaide followed timidly, and knelt beside him. But the Count seemed not to notice her; and, casting his arms round the youth's neck, he bent his head over him, while tears bedewed his cheeks, murmuring with faltering accents, "My son! My brave, my noble son!"

At the same time he strove to raise him; but Ferdinand remained upon his knee, and

lifting his eyes to the Count's face, he answered, "Oh, my father, my dear father! Welcome, welcome from bonds, from captivity, from the grave, to receive your own, and to make all your own happy. A boon, a boon, my father—in this hour of unexpected, of unparalleled joy, grant your child one boon. Cloud not this hour of happiness by the darkest blot that can stain existence. Sprae your brother. He may have wronged you, he may have wronged me, but he is still your brother. Let it not be said that there was one man in all your lordships who had real cause to mourn, that the Count of Ehrenstein came to claim his own again. Let it be all bright, let it be an hour of sunshine and of joy to every one, that brought you back to us, when we all thought you lost for ever."

Adelaide also clasped her hands, and, gazing in his face, strove eagerly to speak, but terror had too strong possession of her, and all that she could utter was, "He is my father—have mercy, have mercy!"

"He is your father, lady," answered the

Count, sternly; "he is my brother. His wrongs to me I could forgive—I do forgive them. His wrongs to those who were dearer to me than life, I forgive them too. But he has wronged others, ay, and with a darker and more devilish art than man might fancy hell itself could produce—blackened the name of the honest and the true, of the most faithful of servants and friends, that he might stifle in the blood of the messenger the crimes committed against him who sent him. Entreat not, Ferdinand, for it is in vain. In this I am immoveable. The hour of mercy, as I have said, is past. Endurance has been prolonged to the utmost; and not even the voice of a son, dear and beloved though he may be, can shake me in my purpose. It is all, all in vain. Rise, youth: if I must speak plain, I deny your boon—I refuse your prayer;. and this man dies, as I hope ——"

"Hold!" said Father George, "there is still another voice to be heard."

"Not yours, good Father," said the Count.

"I love, I esteem you. I know that for this object you have laboured to unite him who is dearest to me on this earth, to the daughter of him who has become my bitterest foe; and I have seen and suffered it, for her virtues atone for the crime of being his daughter. But I have suffered it with the full resolve of guarding myself sternly against your pious policy, and not permitting my firm heart to be moved, even by filial love or parental tenderness, to pardon him who has hardened his heart till pity were folly, and mercy were injustice. Speak not for him; for I will not hear. Your voice is powerless as theirs."

"There may be another stronger," said the monk; and at the same moment a lady, closely veiled, advanced from behind him.

"I know not that!" she said (and she, too, knelt at the Count's feet), "my voice was once strong with you, my noble lord. I am sure that it will be powerful still, unless you are changed indeed—changed in heart, as I am in form, unless your spirit has lost that beauty of

essence which I have lost of person. Yet my voice, now as ever, shall be raised only in entreaty, beseeching you to remember hours of tenderness and love long past, and to grant life and pardon to this man, your brother, for the sake of one who has mourned and wept full twenty years for you."

A strange change had come over the Count of Ehrenstein. It could hardly be said he listened. He heard it, it is true; but his spirit seemed pre-occupied by other thoughts. His face turned deadly pale; he trembled in every limb; he gasped, as if for breath; and all he could utter was, "That voice—that voice!" As she ended, he stretched forth his hands eagerly towards the veil, but ere he could touch it, she threw it back herself, and after one momentary gaze, he cast his arms around her, exclaiming, "My wife, my beloved!" and pressed her to his bosom, with a convulsive clasp.

There was a deep silence through the chapel for some moments, and then, as she still re-

mained resting on her husband's bosom, the voice of the Countess of Ehrenstein murmured a few words in his ear.

"Take him," cried the Count, suddenly, casting wide his right arm, and pointing to his brother, while his left still pressed his wife to his heart: "do with him what you will,—I give him to you, and renounce all power over him and his fate."

Adelaide caught the lady's hand, and kissed it; and gently releasing herself from her husband's embrace, the Countess of Ehrenstein approached his brother, and said, in a low tone, "You are free, my lord; you had better, perhaps, retire, and for a time betake you to some place of seclusion till my lord and husband has forgotten some of the past events, or has time to think more gently of them."

The unhappy man bowed his head low, and with pale cheek, turned away. The crowd drew back to let him pass; but ere he could take two steps from the spot where this scene had passed, Adelaide sprang forward and knelt

before him. He had not noticed—he had not seemed to see her before; but now she raised her beautiful face towards him, with the rich brown hair falling back, and the torch-light streaming on her brow; and, in a tone of musical melancholy, she said, "Forgive me, my father! Oh! forgive me, and let me go with you to comfort you. What I have done, was done only in the hope of saving you, not from undutiful disobedience. I learned that these events were coming, only under the most solemn vow of secrecy, and even then but vaguely. I was told enough, however, to know, or at least to believe, that the only means of rescuing my father from destruction, was by giving my hand to one whose voice might be most powerful with my uncle. I trust—I hope that the love, which I own I felt, had no weight in my resolve; but, at all events, you are saved, my father; and my first duty now is, to beseech your forgiveness, and to try to soothe and to console you."

For an instant, as she spoke, her father eyed

her with a stern and angry glance. Old passions revived; he forgot how he had fallen: pride, and the lingerings of a vengeful spirit, made themselves felt again; but as he raised his eyes, all that he saw around brought back the bitter and humiliating present. He felt that he was crushed down to the very earth,—nay, more, he felt that his own crimes crushed him. His heart was humbled—the first step to true repentance—and that better feeling threw open the gates of the breast to others: parental love returned; ay, and even a sense of gratitude for that which his child had done. He saw, he understood the motives on which she had acted; and listening, softened, to the last words she spoke, he put his arms around her, and leaning down his head, for the first time, he wept.

"I will go with you,—I will go with you," murmured Adelaide.

"Nay, my child, it must not be," replied her father. "I do believe you have acted for the best; but now you are bound in duty to an-

other. Stay with your husband. I have done him wrong; but he loves you deeply, I am sure; and you shall teach him, by your gentle tenderness, to forget your father's faults.—Adieu, my child! May God bless and protect you!"

As he spoke, the Count of Ehrenstein strode forward, and took him by both the hands. "William," he said, "William, do you repent of what you have done?"

"From my heart and soul, Ferdinand," replied his brother. "Nay, more, I have ever repented bitterly. I have found that one crime, besides its own remorse, brings a thousand others to be repented of. The things I have done have haunted me by day and night: they have embittered life; and I have learned, too late, that though crime may purchase a moment's joy, it is sure to be followed by an existence of misery. But you know not—oh! you know not, you who have lived in one course of integrity and honour, how entanglements and temptations crowd upon one, how

they interweave a net, from which the heart, were it as strong as a lion, could not break forth, when once we have plunged into a course of wrong,—how the evil wish begets the evil act, —how the evil act calls to the lie to conceal it, —how the lie, in its shame, has recourse to a new crime to cover it. None can know, none can tell, what are the difficulties, the agonies— what are the struggles, the writhings, of those who go on in doing what is wrong, with some sense of right remaining. Oh! the longing for deliverance; the eager thirst to obliterate the past; the tender thoughts of youth and infancy, and innocence and peace; the fearful looking forward to the future day, when Satan will claim his tribute of fresh wickedness to purchase a brief immunity from the penalty of the soul's dark bond; the effort for firmness, even in the course we have taken; the feeling that there is no real strength but in virtue, no fortitude but in honesty! It is inexpressible, it cannot be described or told: but I call God to witness that I speak the truth, when I say, that I even I,

for the last twenty years—though I seemed to have gained all that ambition could desire—though wealth, power, luxury, enjoyment, were all at my command—have suffered tortures that hell itself can hardly equal, and which might well expiate a life of sin. I know now, I know bitterly, what is the meaning of 'the worm that never dies, and the fire that can never be quenched.' And what has this strife made me?—how changed a thing from what I was before! If I look back but for a few short years, I can see myself a different being. Do you remember, Ferdinand, when we were boys together at Würzburg, and this good lord here of Leiningen was our gay companion, how cheerfully the days passed, how light the hours seemed? Time had no weight: existence was a blessing. The free, sunshiny air came with its wings loaded with enjoyment; the breath of the spring flowers was like the balm of Eden, the singing of the birds an angels' choir. I enjoyed all, in those days; I loved you all well. My heart was open as the heaven to every human

creature. The whole universe had nothing but delight, except when sometimes I thought, with a regretful sullenness, that you were destined to the busy scenes in which I longed to mingle, and I to a cloister's gloom, and the separation of a hard vow from all my fellow men. But that was nothing: a light cloud upon a summer's sky, in a moment borne away, and all was sunshine again, and cheerfulness.— Do you remember, Ferdinand? It seems to me but yesterday."

His face lighted up, as if the sunshine of early days shone forth on his countenance; and as he spoke, he laid his hand forgetfully upon his brother's arm, and gazed upon him with a look of tender memory. The Count, too, gave way to the soft influences of those early days: they came back upon him, as his brother spoke. One harsh feeling after another faded away, like darkness giving place to light: he leaned his arm upon Count William's shoulder; and, bending down his head, while a tear trickled from his eye, he said, "I

do remember, William; I do remember all right well."

"And what am I now?" asked his brother, suddenly withdrawing from him, as if he felt that he was not worthy of that kind familiar touch; "a wretch, an outcast, hated by all, abhorrent to myself. But that is nothing—all nothing to the past. I am happier now than heretofore; for the effect of that dark struggle in my heart was strange and terrible; from kind, I had become fierce and cruel; from gentle and patient, angry and proud. Powerless to enjoy, I hated the sight of enjoyment; and with a chain of adamant about my heart, the sight of a free spirit in another was bitterness to me. Only, indeed, in the case of this youth and this dear girl did I ever witness the pure and simple pleasures of happy innocence, without hating what I witnessed for the reproof it bore me. But it was not so with them.—He knows it was not.—In his wild energies and soaring fancy, in his free spirit and his bold heart, he would often call

back the brother of my youth, vaguely but sweetly, and in the regrets I felt there might mingle melancholy, but no pain. It was too indistinct to wound. It was as a sight or a sound that we have known in childhood, coming back upon the ear of age, and cheating it with a misty dream of early joy.

"Oh, it was sweet to mark him; and, though sometimes—provoked to sudden frenzy, as if a demon whispered, he had wrongs to avenge upon me—I would be fierce and wayward with him, like a tyrant as I was, yet Heaven can testify that I loved him better than any being on earth, except this my child."

The Count suddenly took him by the hand, and, pointing to Father George, he said, "There is hope yet, William—good hope, I am sure; the seed may lie long in the foul earth, but will germinate and bud, and grow and blossom, and bear fruit at last. Speak with this holy man: he will comfort you, he will lead you

to a better forgiveness than a brother's, which is already given. A time in solitude, in thought, and prayer, will calm down remorse into repentance, and hope and peace may yet visit your latter days. I have been entangled for twenty years in earthly bonds: you in fetters that have chained the spirit. I have returned, against all likelihood, to claim that which was once mine; you will return, too, to take a former and a better nature upon you. If she so wills it, this dear girl shall go with you to comfort you."

"No," exclaimed his brother,—"no. That selfishness shall be the first I will cast off. She shall remain where present duty calls her, with those who love and will cherish her. God's blessing upon you, my child! may you be happy as you deserve! and, that no thought for me may break in upon your peace, be assured that the only state in which I can now find repose, is that of solitude and thought, where, removed afar from the battle-field of the passions, I can rest after

the combat in which I have been vanquished; not without pain from my wounds, and shame for my defeat, but still with the hope of recovery, and trust in the future.—Adieu! adieu!" and, disengaging his hand from Adelaide, as she bent her head over it bedewing it with tears, he turned towards the door of the chapel, and walked silently away.

Father George followed him, without a word, merely waving his hand, in token of farewell to the party that remained; and a number of those present crowded round the Count of Ehrenstein, eagerly grasping his hand, and congratulating him upon the events of that night. Adelaide, with her head bent and her eyes full of tears, stood, like a lily of the valley in the shade, by her young husband's side; and Ferdinand, with expanded chest, high head, and beaming eyes, gazed from his mother to his father, who stood for a moment in the midst, with a calm and tempered satisfaction on his countenance, thanking all, but with his mind evidently abstracted from that

which was immediately passing around him. Who can say what were his sensations at that moment?—what was the strange turmoil of feelings in his bosom? There are times when the meeting of the past and the present is sensibly felt, from their strange contrast. We have all seen two rivers unite and flow on in peace, mingling their waters together so gradually that the line of their junction can scarcely be told; but many have beheld two torrents rushing down in fury, like contending armies, and, for a time, struggling in a whirlpool, ere they blend and rush away. Like that whirlpool, perhaps, were the emotions of his mind, when the long lapse of the dark and stormy past first met the gay and sunshiny present. But he was not without power over his own mind; and he conquered the tumult in a few moments. One glance at his wife, as she still clung to his arm; brief thanks to his friends; and then, turning to the Emperor, with the lady's hand in his, he bent the knee, and said, "I do you homage, my liege lord, not only

with a true but with a grateful heart; and among all the causes of regret with which my long captivity has furnished me, there is none greater than that I have been prevented thereby from drawing a sword, which was once good, in behalf of your just rights. All is now in peace, thank God; but, should it be wanted, there is still strength in this old frame to go with you to the field; and, when it fails, here are young, hardy limbs,"—and he pointed to Ferdinand,—"which will never be found unwilling to mount a horse and couch a lance in your Majesty's behalf."

"God grant that we never need them," replied the Emperor, raising him; "but should a wise head and a strong arm, a good sword and a stout heart, be needed in our cause, there is nowhere I will seek them more confidently than with the Count of Ehrenstein and his son.

"And now, knights and nobles," he continued, gaily, "we will bid you all adieu, and back to Spires; for, by my faith! we have been out so late at night, without pretext of war, or

feud, or hunting party, that our fair Empress might think we were fooling away the hours with some rosy country maiden, had we not so strange a tale as this to tell her, of events that have been well worth the seeing.—Good-night to all."

Thus saying, he quitted the chapel, followed by his train.

For some minutes after, a buzz rose up from within, as of many voices speaking. Then came forth men and torches. Horses and litters were sought for, and away towards Hardtenburg wound a long train, to which the gates opened, and spears and men-at-arms, and nobles in gay raiment passed over the drawbridge and through the dark archway. For an hour there were sounds of revelry within. A health, with a loud shout, was given in the great hall; and while many prolonged the banquet and drained the cup to a late hour, two young and graceful figures, lighted by a lamp, moved slowly along one of the wide corridors of the castle. The gentleman held a lamp in his hand, and gazed

down upon his fair companion; the lady, with both hands circling his arm, bent her eyes on the ground, and trod softly, as if in fear of her own foot-falls. Bertha, the gay maid, stood at the end of the passage, and opened the door for them to pass through. She closed it when they were gone; and then, clasping her hands together, she bent them backwards, looked up half sighing, half laughing, and said, "Well, they are happy at last.—Lackaday."

CHAPTER XII.

The public is a body very much like that which assembles round a dinner table, and the wise host will cater for all. For some the substantial joints, for some the *hors d'œuvres* are necessary, and some will dwell long upon the dessert, which others will not deign to taste. Those need not eat, who do not like it; and thus, with the explanations at the end of a long tale, we may say to the reader, close the page if you have heard enough. In the case of many, imagination will supply all gaps, explain all obscurities, far better, probably, than the writer can; at least, that skilful limner will use brighter colours than any that the artist can employ;

but with many another man, on the contrary, fancy requires a leading hand; or curiosity exacts a full account of what the author himself intended. For such, I must give at least one more scene, and that shall be in the same place whence we first set out,—the castle of Ehrenstein.

It was in the great old hall there—that hall so long deserted, or only tenanted for an hour or two, to be again abandoned. Its aspect, however, was now changed; the mould and damp had disappeared from the walls and columns; rich stained glass in the windows, receiving the full light of the summer sun, poured a flood of glorious colours across the pavement; wreaths of flowers wound around the massive pillars; green boughs and glittering armour hung upon the wall; and, though the serving men, from time to time, looked round with habitual dread at any sudden sound, yet the chief party, which remained in the hall after the mid-day meal, was full of gay life and cheerful happiness.

That party was small in number compared with those we have before seen in the same mansion; for the retainers of the house, though lately increased in number, had withdrawn, and left the lord of the castle and his family alone. Old Sickendorf, indeed, still occupied a seat amongst the rest, but the fact was, that the stout aged knight, after a morning spent in hard and vigorous exercise, had eaten and drunk to repletion, and was now nodding away the hour of digestion with his head leaning on his hand. At the head of the table, sat the old Count of Ehrenstein himself, with ineffaceable traces of cares and labours still visible on his cheek and brow, his hair white as snow, and his beard and eyebrows somewhat grey, but with a clear light in his keen eye, the rose upon his cheek, his frame firm and strong, and a hand that could raise a cup rounded with wine untrembling to his lips. Through all and above all sparkled that living grace which never dies; which age cannot wither, nor time touch; which death itself—as those who have marked

the clay of men kindly and cheerful in their nature, must know well—which death itself, I say, gives over to corruption undiminished—the grace which an elevated, generous, and noble spirit spreads through the whole frame that contains it.

By his side sat his long-lost but well-beloved wife, who now, in the garments of her rank and station, freed from grief, anxiety, and apprehension, had recovered from the grasp of time a great portion of that beauty for which she had once been famous. Her eyes were turned upon the face which she had so constantly loved, her hand rested near his, as if ready to touch it, and assure herself that he was there indeed; and the half opened lips, when he spoke, showed how she drank in his words, and how musical to her ear was the voice which she had once deemed stilled in death.

Near them were another pair, in the first fruition of life's brightest hopes, Ferdinand and Adelaide. His face was all brightness; his joy was at its full; care and sorrow had no hold

upon his heart; from his own bosom spread forth a light that brightened all things; and the world, and every object it contained, seemed instinct with joy, and lustrous with happiness. Man's nature is not more susceptible of pleasurable emotions than woman's, and, indeed, perhaps the finer delights, the more delicate enjoyments which she feels, are to him unknown; yet, as an equivalent, those very fine movements of the spirit, which are the source of so much delight, are often the cause of shadowy afflictions. Man can enjoy to the full, woman seldom, without some vague sensation of a different character,—it may be melancholy, it may be regret, it may be fear—mingling even with the cup of joy, perhaps to diminish, perhaps to heighten the flavour, —which I know not.

The lady's face was full of satisfaction, her beautiful eyes beamed with joy; but yet —— oh, that there should ever be "but yet" —— those eyes would sometimes turn thoughtfully towards the ground, and a shade would come

over that angelic face; it could not be called a cloud, it was so light, so evanescent. Perhaps the reader may divine, without explanation, the cause of that vague shadow, or, at all events, a word will give him a clue. Her father was not there; and memories of his fate and his loneliness would interweave themselves with the warp of thought, and chequer with darker figures the bright web of her own happiness.

One more figure completed the group,—it was that of good Father George, now prior of his order; the abbacy he had declined; although, since the events we have lately narrated, the worthy but weak Lord Abbot had died—it was whispered from a surfeit, of a very nice but dangerous animal, called in the language of the country "*Nine-eyes*," which has slain almost as many great men as the sword. The good monk hardly looked as fresh and well as when first we beheld him, for he had lately passed through some scenes of great excitement; and it is a curious fact, that men of advanced life,

who generally are less susceptible of strong emotions, suffer more severely than others when they do feel them. Nevertheless, during the meal he had been more gay than usual, and now he was prolonging the conversation aloud with the Count, while, from time to time, Ferdinand and Adelaide spoke together in low tones, of things which referred only to themselves.

"Ah! my good lord," said the Prior, "if the verse-maker Ovid had lived in these days, he might have added more than one book to his Metamorphoses, and, in this very place, might have found matter for many a long and ponderous verse. We have all, indeed, undergone transformation—you from a jester to a count; I from a poor monk to a rich prior; and you, my good youth, from a stripling to a married man. Nor amongst the least is the change of this old hall. Why, not two months ago, that is when last I saw it, it was all dark and mouldy, the stone-work peeling away, the rafters rotting and inclined to fall, with nought

in it but the old banners and the great chair of state. Men were afraid to tread it for fear of spectres, and the whistling wind, the bats, and the dust, were its only tenants. Now it looks as gay and as sunshiny as a bridal banquet-chamber, with its gay garlands and festive flowers, and all fears seem laid aside in its new freshness.

"Nay, not quite all fears," answered the Count; "and I believe they never will be; for there is nothing so enduring as traditional terror. From time to time, some of the men will look around over the left shoulder, whenever the name of ghost or apparition is mentioned; and often have I seen a merry tale interrupted in the midst, by one man being seized with fears and infecting all the rest. But I do not much mind that. At present, their terror does not go to an inconvenient length; and with the passing days it will wear down to a calm and wholesome superstition, which may have its advantages. Doubtless, too, those who know all the secrets of the

place, will whisper, amongst the rest, the causes of all they have seen, and if they do, the marvellous will suffer greatly, though doubtless, in winnowing truth from falsehood, some part of the chaff still stays with the corn."

"What were the causes, my dear lord?" asked Adelaide, fixing her eyes upon him; "I am well nigh as ignorant as the others; and though, as Ferdinand can tell you, I am not much given to fear ——"

"When love is in the case, dear child," said the Count, interrupting her, with a smile. "But come, as a reward for that dear love, I will tell you all."

"It has been well rewarded already," she said, looking at her husband; "but yet I would fain know, and we will take the history as a pure grace. I guess at some things, and I know others, but still there is much that is dark and misty; and I have often heard, my dear lord and uncle, that woman's curiosity will not rest satisfied till all has been discovered. I see amongst us here in the hall at meal-time, many a scarred and

weather-beaten face that I know not; but all their eyes seem to turn to you as if you were a saint, so that they must have known you long; and I hear them talk of distant lands and strange adventures, and therefore I deem they must have been your companions in the Holy Land."

"My good friends and fellow-soldiers of the Cross, my dear child," replied the old Count. "With a noble train of such as these, now more than twenty years ago, I left my home to fight, in company with other lords of this and distant lands, for the deliverance of Christ's sepulchre. We were bound by a vow to give our banners to the wind upon the shores of Syria or Africa before a certain day; but in the fair city of Venice, the starlight daughter of the blue Adriatic, of which the heathen Venus was but an imperfect type, I met with one who made me long to break my oath—" and he laid his hand upon his wife's. "When she became a soldier's bride, however, she felt for a soldier's renown, and sadly, yet unmurmuringly, parted

from me, that I might fulfil the promise I had made. I went, dear child, leaving some faithful friends and followers to guard her hither, after our first child's birth; and then comes a time, on the events of which I will not dwell. You have already heard too much, perchance. Suffice it that I was wronged, and that the wrong has been forgiven. When I was captured by the Saracens, some of my brave companions fell, some were taken with me, some escaped to a castle of the Knights Hospitallers on the African shore. There I had left a certain sum of treasure; but my sword had plagued the infidels too sorely for them to let me go, without enormous ransom. The Order of St. John and my comrades who had escaped, trafficked eagerly with my captors to liberate me; but it was in vain; and in those distant lands some years were consumed in these fruitless endeavours. While they went on, I was permitted to see several of my friends; and a plan struck me, for using their services to gain the freedom of my companions in misfortune. At my desire,

they bound themselves to serve the Order of St. John in arms, a certain number of years, upon condition that at the end of each man's time the Order should redeem from slavery one of their comrades of equal rank, they still retaining their homage to me. Thus, in the course of the last four or five years, all of my train who survived had been set free, the one part from the bondage of the infidel, the other from their engagements to the Order; and as each man thus obtained liberty, I sent him back hither with a sum of money, to watch over and guard my child; for I knew that he still lived, although I had wept for his mother as in the grave. To each I furnished a knowledge of the secrets of this place,—for it has secrets, as you will soon hear,—and bade them address themselves either to my reverend friend, Father Francis, or to my old henchman, good Franz Creussen, for farther information and directions. My own liberation seemed hopeless; not a ray of light broke in upon the darkness of my fate; till some good soul in

England, where there are kind hearts and wealthy men, left a large sum to the Knights of St. John, for the purpose of ransoming the prisoners of the Cross. Still, the sum demanded for me was very large: there were many who were suffering as severely as myself: the Knights did not think it just to redeem any one man at such a price; and I might have lingered still in Saracen bonds, had not my noble friend, Frederick of Leiningen, come over to war in behalf of the Order; and, when he heard of my state, gave up all the recompense that was his due from the Hospitallers, to make up the amount of my ransom, with what the Grand Master had already offered to give When the news first reached me that I was free, I cannot tell you—for I am not a learned man, like my good brother—all the strange thoughts and considerations that came into my mind. I fancied, if I came back in my true character, supported by Count Frederick's power, and the sixty or seventy good warriors I had sent back, I should have to punish the guilty, as well as to reward

the honest, and perhaps to war for my inheritance against my own blood. I am not a harsh or cruel man, my child, and the thought frightened me. I therefore bethought me to take some disguise; but what to choose I knew not. If I came back with shield and spear, as a follower of Count Frederick's, I felt sure my brother would recognise me at once in a garb which I had so often worn before his eyes. So I fell upon a jester's habit; for I had ever been fond of a smart speech and a gay joke, and in my young days could cope in his own coin with any fool of the imperial court. The dress was sent me before I joined my friend, that his followers might not know me in any other character; and I came hither in that garb, as you know.—But now, to turn back to the fate of those I had sent over before: three or four perished by the way, the rest arrived in safety. The first, immediately on their return to their native land, visited the cell of Father George, and from him received instructions how to act. —I know not, my reverend friend," and he

turned to the good monk, "whether I read your intentions rightly; but it has always seemed to me that your design was to collect the men together in one body, to be ready for all emergencies; and that, foreseeing or hoping I should myself in time return, you wished by superstitious impressions to prepare my brother's mind for that event, and induce him to yield to me, willingly and cheerfully, all that he had wrongly assumed."

"Good faith! my dear son," replied Father George, "if the truth must be told, I, at first, had no design, like many another man who is supposed to act upon well-digested schemes of policy; when, if put upon his truth and honour, he would acknowledge that circumstances suggested deeds. I hid the men in the old vaults, when first they arrived, because I knew not what else to do with them. Some of the people of the place saw them, and took them for ghosts; so I said, 'In Heaven's name, let them be ghosts!' It was a better mode of concealment than any I could devise. Then, again, as

their numbers increased, it was necessary to provide them with food. My poor old trembling hands could not carry up all that was necessary; and therefore I applied to good Franz Creussen, who, I knew, would supply, and not betray. With him the whole business of the apparitions was matured; and from the key which you gave me long ago of the private passages, other keys were made, to give the good men exit and entrance when they pleased."

"Ay," said the Count, "it is of those private passages I was about to speak. You must know, my dear child, that when the old castle was pulled down, some two hundred years ago, and a new one built in its place, a famous architect was employed, who did not live to see his whole designs completed, but was buried under one of the chambers, where his tomb now stands. His son continued the work to a conclusion, and the plans have never been made known to any but the lord of this castle and his eldest son. Ere long, I will lead Fer-

dinand through the whole of the building, and will show him the map thereof, which lies in a niche of the architect's tomb. Suffice it to say, that the whole of this vast structure, solid as it seems, and solid as it indeed is, in reality, is double; there is as much beneath the surface of the rock as above it. Every wall has its passage; between the ceiling of one chamber and the floor of another, are rooms, and halls, and staircases; and there is no part in the whole inhabited portion of the castle of Ehrenstein, that I could not reach without showing myself to one mortal eye of all those who are moving about in the clear and open day. The great extent of the building, the masses of its towers and walls, the cornices and mouldings, the buttresses and turrets, conceal all the contrivances which were resorted to in its construction. No eye gazing on it from without asks, 'with what chamber communicates that loophole?' Or, 'why is there so great a space between one range of windows and another?' All is in such good keeping,

that all seems natural and ordinary; and by means of these rooms and passages, you and yours have been surrounded for the last five years, when you thought yourselves most alone, by a body of men daily increasing, who, at a word, would have seized the castle in their rightful lord's name. Such were the circumstances when I myself arrived. I soon gathered, from what I heard, that the old hall had been deserted, on account of rumours of apparitions, and, having held frequent communication with my friends here after my liberation, I easily divined the cause. More information, however, was required, and that information I gained when I undertook to watch in this hall with you, my son. From that moment my course was determined, my path clear. I suffered events to take their course, but added numerous warnings to my brother to soften his heart, to awaken remorse, and to induce him to do right, without a struggle, when the moment came. In your own secret marriage, my dear children, I acquiesced, from feelings I cannot

well define nor describe. First, if ever there was one who won upon the heart at first sight, it is this dear girl; and next, there was in my bosom a vague unwillingness to strike the very blow I meditated, a lingering anxiety for some excuse to pardon and forget. I gladly seized that which was offered me; and however watchful and ready to step in and save my child, should need be, yet I was not displeased to see him somewhat tried by difficult circumstances, ere the day of his fortunes became unclouded and serene. You may now range the events and their causes easily for yourselves, for I have explained all that is needful to the right understanding of the past."

While the Count had been speaking, old Sickendorf had roused himself from his slumber, and was listening attentively; but when a pause ensued he exclaimed, "Ay, that accounts for many a good ghost, my lord, but the one I saw was a real ghost, I will swear; for you had not arrived at the castle then. Tell me that I would not know a man-at-arms

from a shadow! Pooh! pooh! I am too old a soldier for that."

"Doubtless, just such another ghost as the rest," replied the Count, while Father George listened to the quiet smile.

"Not a whit of it," cried Sickendorf, "it made no more noise than a cat, and walked through the door as if it had been air.—I 'll call Bertha—Bertha saw it too," and striding to the door of the hall, the old man shouted for our pretty friend at the top of his voice,—"Bertha, Bertha!" he exclaimed; "some of you knaves send the girl hither. Devil take the girl! any one ought to hear my voice at the top of the west turret."

"She is busy, sir, I fancy," answered one of the men without; "but I will call her for you;" and at the same moment the voice of Father George exclaimed, "Herr von Sickendorf, come hither again. What would you say, if I were the ghost?"

"Pooh! nonsense!" exclaimed Sickendorf bluntly, "I won't believe it."

"It is nevertheless true," answered Father George; "I was crossing the end of the hall in the dusk to visit my young friend, Count Ferdinand, here, when I saw you and Bertha together: I heard her scream, but, guessing what was the occasion, took no notice, and went upon my way. You may remember that you found me in his room; and as to my silent step, I should think you had heard often enough from Count William, that 'the noiseless sandal of the church reaches higher places than the clanking heel of the man-at-arms;' at least, so he was wont to say. He may think differently now."

Adelaide had fallen into thought, as the good Father spoke, and the shade had come over her fair brow. But Father George observed the change, and, going over to her side, he said in a low voice, "Do not grieve for him, my dear child. It was but yesterday your father owned to me, that he had never known peace or happiness till now. He has chosen his fate; Heaven has granted him a

period between the turmoil, the strife, the passions, the sins of the world, and that state where all is irretrievable, and all to be accounted for. Doubt not that he will use it to the best advantage; and if so, happy is it for him that those things which withheld him from better thoughts and higher purposes have been taken away. But should power, and reverence, and honour still have any hold upon his mind, or any value in his eyes, they are within his reach. The abbacy is still vacant, and undoubtedly at his disposal; I know not whether he will seek it or not, and by not one word will I endeavour to influence him. If he feels like me, he will avoid that which has been a snare to most men, and a fall to many; but, at all events, we will pray that God may grant him grace in any state to fulfil the duties of his station wisely—but here comes Bertha."

"There, there," cried Sickendorf; "say nought of the ghost; that's done. We'll have

no more of them. But who, in fortune's name! has she got with her?"

"The Emperor's page," cried Adelaide; some degree of alarm mingling with her surprise.

Bertha, however, advanced up the hall with a timid and downcast look, and glowing cheek, not at all with her usual gay and light-hearted air and countenance; her steps were slow and hesitating; her bright eye veiling itself under the sweeping lashes, and her hands, with the invariable sign of bashful hesitation, playing with the tassels of her bodice. Behind her came the page, with his plumed bonnet in his hand, and more of sheepishness in his air, too, than was usual with himself or any page of the day. But the matter was soon explained, though in somewhat broken sentences.

"Please you, my lord," said Bertha, presenting herself before the Count; "here's one of the Emperor's pages ——"

"I was, pretty Bertha," interrupted the young man; "but I am now out of my pagehood."

"And he has come to ask a question," said Bertha.

"To which I have got an answer," said the page, twirling round his bonnet gaily, but casting down his eyes at the same time.

"Not yet, master Carl," rejoined Bertha, quickly; "I told you it must depend upon the will of my lord and lady."

"Oh, but they won't refuse if you wish it," cried the youth.

"Who told you I wished it?" exclaimed Bertha. "I only said that sooner than break your heart—and you know you swore more than twenty times that it would if I refused—I would marry you, just to save you from drowning, or a halter, or some other bad kind of death; but that is not to say that I wish it. On the contrary, I will do what my lord and lady think fit. I am quite passive, and do nothing but out of pure benevolence;" and she clasped her pretty hands before her, and rolled one thumb round the other with the most indifferent air in the world.

"Has inclination no share in it, my fair one?" said the Count, with a smile; "if so, I think I shall withhold my consent; for such indifferent marriages are never happy ones."

Bertha's cheek began to grow warm, and she answered, in a hesitating tone, "I can't say I dislike him, my lord—I like him as well as any other man."

"I must have something more than that, pretty Bertha," replied her lord, with a slight degree of malice. "I am too grateful for all you have done to serve those I love, to let you wed a man to whom your whole heart is not given. You must like him better than any other man, or never marry him."

"Well, perhaps I do like him a little better than most," answered Bertha, with a sigh at her confession.

"Well enough to make a very good wife, my lord the Count," interposed the page.

"Never believe that any woman will make a good wife who does not love her husband, young gentleman," rejoined the Lord of Ehren-

stein. "Do you love him with all your heart, Bertha?"

"Yes," whimpered the girl.

"Better than any?"

"Yes."

"Better than all? Would you give your life for him? Will you give it up to him?"

"Yes, yes, yes," she replied, and burst into a fit of tears.

"Well, then, you shall have a dower and a blessing," replied the Count; "and I doubt not you will, as he says, make him a very good wife; for the sauciest maidens sometimes turn out the humblest spouses. But what says the Emperor, my good youth?"

"Oh, he says that I may do as I like," replied the young man; "and, good faith! he could not well say less, for I believe he would have married her himself if, by good luck, he had not had another wife."

"Nay, that was a stroke of fortune on your behalf," answered the Count, laughing; "in the lands I have just left, he would have married her

notwithstanding. But, by my faith! I think one such will prove enough for any man."

"Enough for me, my lord," said the page, with some grace; "I seek no more, and with her shall find happiness enough."

Bertha held out her hand to him with a warm smile, exclaiming, "Well, I do love you dearly."

"Right, right," cried the Count; "this is all right. We will take care of your household, Bertha. Let your own heart make the sunshine, and we will see that it shall have few worldly clouds; and now, if long courtships be good, speedy weddings are better; so go your ways and settle the day between you, leaving all the rest to us."

Ere ten days more had passed, there was a marriage train wound down from the castle towards the little chapel in the wood; for Bertha, with a gay smile in her young mistress's face, had prayed that her wedding might be there celebrated, instead of the loftier building at the castle. The way was strewed with flowers by

young girls from the village, and garlands hung amongst the branches of the old oaks and beeches. Light hearts and pretty faces gathered round; and nought was wanting to the happiness of Bertha but the presence of her young lord and the old Count, who had promised to give her to her husband. Both, however, had ridden away from the castle at an early hour, and good Franz Creussen had appeared in the bridal train as a substitute for the Count of Ehrenstein, to perform the part of parent to the fair bride. The Countess and Adelaide accompanied her, and when by the way she ventured to express her regret that her good lord was not to be present, Adelaide replied, with a smile, perhaps produced by a comparison between her feelings at the moment and those with which she had trod the same path herself as a bride, "Doubtless he will come, Bertha; for he went away this morning early, without telling any one his errand. I know he intended to be here."

I have, far away in the beginning of this true history, described a spot where the little

chapel, and the door with its fretted stone-work, first appeared on the road descending from the castle, and when Bertha's bridal train reached that point, a group was seen in the green glade before the portal, somewhat more splendid than might have been expected to attend the bridegroom on his meeting with his betrothed. There were dresses of silk and velvet, of gold and embroidery, a banner or two waving above the horsemen, and a small group of men-at-arms behind, with lances raised, and limbs hanging drowsily, as if forming part of a scene in which they took no great interest. In front were four or five gentlemen on foot, and the first who came forward at a quick pace was the gay page. Behind, however, were seen the Count of Ehrenstein and his son, and near them, a step in advance, with head slightly bended, and all that air of dignity, if not of pride, which is so frequently generated by the habit of unlimited command, appeared the Emperor himself. He was speaking eagerly to the

Count of Ehrenstein, as if they had just met, but when the two groups united, he took a kiss of Bertha's warm cheek, saying, "I have come unasked to your wedding, fair maid, out of love for yon youth and for you; make him a good wife as you have been a faithful friend, and if he makes you a good husband he shall never want advancement. Now let us forward to the ceremony: I will stand for his father who is far away in Vienna, and you will have a noble godfather, who will doubtless portion you as you deserve."

Bertha replied not, but by low obeisance; but, in the mean while, the Count of Ehrenstein had placed himself between his wife and his step-daughter, and, addressing himself to the latter, he said, "Let this be a joyful day for us all, my dear Adelaide! I have just returned from your father. Thinking that in such a case as this, we might well bury all bitter memories and unkind feelings of the past, I went over to the Abbey to see if he would quit his solitude, and join our little festival. Though

he declined to quit his cell till his vows be taken and his fate sealed, yet it will give peace and comfort to your heart to know that our hands have clasped in peace, and that we have mutually agreed to remember nought but that we are brothers. All is forgiven. By me all shall be forgotten; if he remembers aught, it is the secret of his own heart, and between him and his God. He is seeking happiness in the only course where he can find it; and he bade me tell you that your joy and peace was the only earthly blessing that Heaven could bestow. No more shadows on that fair brow, then, my dear child; for though I have marked them with love, I have marked them with regret; and be assured that he who is most justly dear to you, except your husband, knows best the way to his own peace."

Adelaide replied not in words, but she took the old Count's hand, and kissed it tenderly, and then accompanied her husband and father-in-law to the chapel, where Bertha's marriage vows were speedily plighted.

"And now, my good lord Count," said the Emperor, "I have come to spend a day within your castle halls, bringing with me but a small escort; for I know that the good nobles of this land are somewhat fearful of encroachments upon their rights."

"Had you come with a whole host, my liege lord," replied the Count, "you should have been welcome; my heart is as free of fear as it is of guile. I have served your house ere now in war and in counsel, and you will see nought within my walls to make you doubt that I am ever ready to do so still. Were you a bad or an unjust monarch, which I know you not to be, you might, perchance, seek to infringe the rights, or disturb the peace of your vassals; but I do not think the first with whom you would begin would be the Count of Ehrenstein."

"Assuredly not," replied the Emperor; "and to say the truth, the object of my coming, noble friend, is to seek counsel and assistance from your experience in framing some system

by which the rights and the happiness of all classes of people in this empire may be better secured. The private wars of the lands, the constant feuds that take place between cities and nobles, and between nobles themselves, as well as the condition of the peasantry, form a great evil, which requires some remedy. Count Frederick of Leiningen will join us this night, and we will consult together—not bringing preconceived opinions or unreasonable prejudices to council, and then fancying we deliberate, but considering well and calmly whether anything can be done, and if so, what had best be done to ameliorate the condition of the people, and the institutions of the realm."

They met as was proposed; and in the consultation of that night was drawn out the first sketch of that famous chamber of justice at Spires, to which all causes of contention and dispute were referred. Years passed, it is true, before the scheme was acted upon, but when once it was in full operation, it soon

put an end to that almost anarchical state of which some scenes have been displayed in the foregoing pages.

Little more remains to be told. The latter years of the Count of Ehrenstein passed in peace; and, bowed with age, though scarcely sensible of decay, he fell quietly asleep at a more advanced age than is usually attained by men who have undergone such hardships, and endured such privations. Old Sickendorf, too, with the flame burning dimly over the lamp, passed far beyond man's allotted term. His body submitted to all the ordinary processes of age; withered away from that of the stout old knight to that of the decrepit and querulous old man, sank into the lean and slippered pantaloon, and thence, through life's last act, into the grave. His tombstone marks his age as 93; but the truth of the record may be doubtful, for no one could ever ascertain the precise year in which he was born. Bertha made a very good and joyous wife, retaining just sufficient of the playful malice of her

youth to keep the waters of existence from stagnating; and Ferdinand and Adelaide of Ehrenstein went on to the end with the same bond of love between them which had encircled them in childhood, and been knit fast in youth. In the lavish spirit of strong affection, he had, as we have seen, made many a promise of enduring tenderness; but his honour was very dear to him, and, had he even felt inclined to break one of those dear engagements, he would have still held that a promise to a woman is even more binding than to a man. But Adelaide never had to remind him of one vow. Happily, her own high qualities, her deep devotion to himself, her gentleness, and the strong moving spirit of love which ruled her every action, deprived duty of all honour in the unwavering performance of each assurance he had given. Their hearts and their happiness shed their sunshine around them, and as the old retainers dropped away, others supplied their place, and inherited their veneration for their lord and lady.

Thus passed the days of the earthly inhabitants of the castle of Ehrenstein; its unearthly tenants disappeared with the return of the old Count to reclaim his own. Gradually the tales of spirits and apparitions became less frequent and more vague; but yet they have not entirely faded away from tradition; and the peasant returning home late at night, from market or fair, will pass the mouldering bridge with some awe, and fancy that he sees shadowy shapes and giant forms, when he looks up by moonlight to the crumbling walls and ruined towers of Ehrenstein.

THE END.

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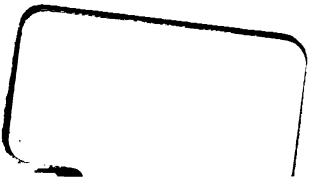
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